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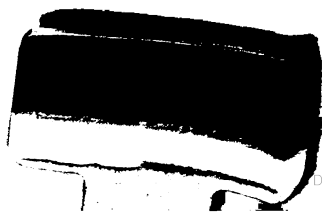
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BY STROKE
OF SWORD

ANDREW
BALFOUR

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BY STROKE OF SWORD



THERE AND THEN I HAD MY FIRST LESSON IN THE ART

Page 21

BY STROKE OF SWORD

A ROMANCE, TAKEN FROM THE CHRONICLES OF
SIR JEREMY CLEPHANE, KING'S JUSTICE AND
KNIGHT OF THE SHIRE OF FIFE, OVERLOOKED BY
MASTER JUDAS FRASER, DOMINIE OF THE PARISH
OF KIRKTOUN, AND RENDERED INTO A MORE
MODERN ENGLISH BY ANDREW BALFOUR

LONDON: METHUEN AND COMPANY
36 ESSEX STREET, STRAND: 1897



SIR JEREMY CLEPHANE

HIS PREFIX

HAVING lived long, and seen much of this world's ways, I know full well that some, perchance it may be many, who read this tale will assuredly say,—

‘This fellow lies. Did anyone see the like; for how could things come to pass with such quickness, and to such good purpose?’

Now, here is the very point; for had my adventures been as those of other men, then truly I should have by no means taken the trouble of setting them down in order, as I have done, for it has been a weary task.

Howbeit, I will confess that there is one matter in which I have lied; but the lie had passed without note after I had vowed not to set pen to paper again; for it was not, as I have stated, Sir Jaspar, but Simon Grisel, who threw the stone at the cur and stopped its singing as we waited for the hour of six in the street of Saint Mary Axe.

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND, AT CROOKNESS,
THIS 12TH DAY OF AUGUST, IN
THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 16—.

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BY STROKE OF SWORD

CHAPTER I

OF MY BIRTH AND MANNER OF GROWTH

IT seems strange to me, Jeremy Clephane, that at such an age as it hath pleased God that I should reach—and he knows it is not a small one—I should take upon me to set on paper those strange wanderings and yet stranger escapades which have fallen to my lot.

I say it passes my comprehension that it should be so, and would, without doubt, have passed that of many I once knew, though truly but few of them had much at the best, but as it happens they have one and all gone to their own place, albeit many a one of them hath wagered with me that I should go before him ; but whither am I wandering ?

Of a truth an' my worthy father, though more given to Latin than the King's English, had witnessed how I have gone off my course, he would have made my nether parts tingle as if a meduse had trailed its streamers over and about them ; but he sleeps these fifty and more years in the kirkyard on the hill, and in his stead have reigned two dominies, more gifted mayhap in the classics, but in tingling powers mere babes to old Hal Clephane, albeit it seems to me that hides are more tender than was their wont.

But I am off at a tangent again, as Phil Bartelow would have said. In short, then, it is the present dominie, Master Judas Fraser—though why he should be called Judas I know not—who hath urged me to set pen to paper, and I was the more willing as I have but little wherewith to pass

the time on these long summer evenings, save to smoke a pipe of good Indian weed from the old skull jar and to listen to the waves as they make rippling noises on the shingly beach.

Now is this prefix come almost to a close, save only for what I shall here set down.

I am a Scotchman to the backbone—ay, and further, if you will—and so it haps that I have little ease in the writing of such English as Master William Shakespeare affects, though it is said to be very fine and wonderful withal, so I must even write as I have learned, but as this book will deal much of Englishmen, not to speak of Spaniards, and as, perchance, it may be read by some in England, for stranger things have come to pass to my certain knowledge, the dominie has promised to change what may be in need of change, for there are some folk who cannot make head or tail of a haddie, know not what it is to yammer, and have never heard tell of wheen, or muckle, and many another good word of the Scot's tongue—but to my tale. I have heard my father say, when he had stowed away under his waistband a goodly cargo of what was in those days well known as 'the kingdom,' that I, owing to my great modesty and backwardness in appearing on this earth, had, beyond all doubt, been the death of my mother, and after so saying he had a habit of taking me tenderly on his knees, and with tears in his eyes rewarding me in a fashion more lavish than pleasant.

Now, of this I could by no means see the justice, as if I was what the dominie calls a matricide, then was I one without intent, and the sad demise of Mistress Clephane should more rightly have been laid to the charge of Betty Muckready, who, though she had piloted many a little craft safely into life, yet had managed to land not a few in the port of heaven with their mothers to look after them; which, after all, was but right and proper, as this world is but a small place, and were it not for Betty and her kind might in time become overfull, the which may Providence forbid! for as it is, it is not large enough for both Englishmen and Spaniards as I have seen. However that may be, I sometimes think that had there been room enough for both my mother and myself I might have been a somewhat different

being, though whether that had been for good or evil the reader must himself judge, for as I was a modest babe, so I have ever been a modest man, and hope so to remain till the end.

Now it is well known that children grow, and, moreover, that their growth is more to length than to breadth, but for some cause or other it was not so with me, and while I by no means added cubits to my stature, I grew in breadth till, when I was of such an age that I might go to school, I was, so all said, the strangest looking mortal in Kirkcoun, and though I trusted they lied to me, for some of the Kirkcoun folk were queerly-built craft, yet I much feared they spoke the truth, and many a time sobbed myself to sleep to think that such a curse should have fallen upon me, though thereafter I had reason to bless the days in which I did not grow in length. Now, though I was broad as I was long, and mayhap broader, I would not have you think I was in anywise deformed or misshapen, for my face was as other boys', and, I thank God, better than some—to wit, Dick Ramsay, whose teeth stuck out before him as if to reach his dinner first, and Timothy Rotgut down whose nose one might look as he came forwards, and there were others, but these will serve.

Nor was my back rounded or my shoulder hunched as was the way with some, and though my arms were long, yet, what of that, better be long in some parts than short in all.

It is no wonder then that, on my going to school, I should have been given a name, for no boy is content with another's name and rests not till he has dubbed him afresh.

Now the manner of my dubbing was in this wise.

My father had taken me at the ripe age of eight years to the school upon the hill, and on my first day there, to show no doubt that he favoured not his offspring one whit, had thrashed me twice, once at the opening of the lesson and once at its close, to the great joy of all save myself. Indeed, one youth was so overjoyed at the sight that, in a hapless moment for himself, he chuckled and laughed aloud, which he had better have left undone, for my worthy father straightway pounced upon him and dragged him forth; and to judge by his writhes and howls my father's arm had lost none of its vigour in the flogging of his son.

I was secretly glad at this sight, which, indeed, comforted my sores in wondrous fashion, but when the day's work was over I bethought me to steal home quietly, for there were signs which made me think that Dick Honeyman—for such was the boy's name who had been beaten—had something in store for me. Therefore I strove to be gone first, but, as luck would have it, I tripped in my haste and was quickly seized by him, and he would have proceeded to buffet me on the spot had not the other boys come up, and seeing promise of fair sport, haled us both to a little clearing in the wood, where they formed a ring around us and set us opposite each other.

I was not long in finding out that I was no favourite, and this not so much on account of my strange form and build as because I was old Hal Clephane's son.

And once again I could by no means see the justice of it. Here was I, beaten by my father on account of my mother, and now I was to be beaten by a schoolfellow on account of my father. The thought galled me, and I plucked up heart and looked at my opponent.

He was a big boy, nigh twice as tall as I was, but I thought his shoulders lacked firmness, and his calves substance; while I, though both younger and smaller, had a strange thickness for a boy of my age, and, moreover, was used to being buffeted, and what brought comfort to me was the remembrance of his howls and twists under the leathern strap. Therefore, I say, I plucked up heart and doubled my fists.

'Now,' cried a big boy, who directed the proceedings, 'fair dealing, my young cocks, and he who hitteth under the belly-band shall be hit,' and ere I knew where I was we were at each other, and I was struck upon the face.

This, however, while rousing me, served but to make me cautious, therefore I stood and warded off his blows, watching my chance the while.

'Into him, Dick,' the boys shouted, 'give old Leatherhide's spawn a heavy one. He has no fight in him. One upon the mouth, Dick! Bravo, lad! A body-blow! A body-blow!'

I felt miserable and sad when I saw how they were set against me, but I was resolved all the more to die rather

than be beaten, and, ever watching his eyes, I waited for my chance. At last it came.

Thinking he had tired me out, for my lip was bleeding and one of my eyes had ceased to be an eye, he rushed upon me quickly, waving his arms like a flail.

Then I let out upon him, and in less time than it takes to set it down I had him on his back, and being now all but mad with rage and pain, I had half-choked him ere they dragged me off.

While some looked after the fallen champion, the most gathered round me and stood staring at me in surprise, then the big boy, of whom I have already made mention, spoke.

‘How are you called?’ he asked me.

‘Jeremy,’ I mumbled, for my lip hurt mightily.

‘His name is Jeremy,’ shouted the big boy, ‘but what shall we call him?’

‘The wild cat,’ said one, ‘for he fights like nothing else on earth.’

‘The toad,’ shouted another, ‘for he is like one.’ Now it had been better for that boy had he not spoken, as he found ere many days were gone.

‘Call him what he is,’ said a boy with a pale face, a streak of a mouth and a thin body.

‘And what may that be?’ said their leader.

‘Squat,’ said the thin boy, and turning on his heel, he walked away.

Thus it was that I received this name which verily has stuck to me ever since, there having been no occasion for the changing of it, as Providence never saw occasion for changing me.

Now, you who read this may perhaps wonder that a small place like Kirkcubright, which, to say truth, is more taken up with the catching of fish than of knowledge, should be furnished with a school, but you will do well to remember that the reformed religion had made great strides even in those days, and that the rule of the priests and of ignorance was come to an end, for the which you will do well to return thanks.

No doubt many in the land, and among them the queen herself, though she was but a queen in name, still clung to

the old ways, but most of the nobles, and more of the common folk, had gladly embraced the new faith.

My father had been a close follower of the great Knox—whose house, indeed, I have seen with my own eyes—and the Reformer had ever urged that the only way of dealing with the evil was to teach something better, and that more especially to the young.

Thus it came about that Hal Clephane, who, to tell the truth, had been somewhat of a ruffler in his youth, settled down in his middle age to the quiet life of a dominie, for he was not without learning, and knew well how to impart the same.

Few came to his school at the first, but in a little time the fame of it spread as far as the town of St Andrews on the east, and Dunfermline on the west, and a boy would walk twelve long miles and more to sit under Hal Clephane of Kirkcoun, in the parish school.

Now, after I had grown in years, though but little in height, having somewhat of a love for book-lore, all Kirkcoun looked to see me fill my father's shoes, and when I was not called 'Jeremy, the Squat,' I even went by the name of the 'the wee dominie'; and though, mark you, I was ever modest, yet I took no small pride to myself on this account, and looked for nothing better than to have the teaching and flogging of a future progeny.

But, as you may have guessed, it was willed in other fashion, and of the events which led to my becoming a wanderer on the face of the earth, not to speak of the sea, I shall now make mention, and in the first place, of the strange man who dwelt upon the shore.

CHAPTER II

OF THE STRANGE MAN WHO DWELT UPON THE SHORE

TEN years had passed away since I had thrashed Dick Honeyman and been called the Squat, and yet there were few changes in Kirkcubright. In the world outside us there had been stirring doings—plots and counter-plots, wars and rumours of war—but all this stir and bustle scarce touched our little town, save only to give cause of talk and gossip to those who had nothing better wherewith to occupy themselves. As for me, when I was not poring over *Virgil*, *Homer* or the books of *Livy*, I cared for nought except adding to my strength, for I was resolved if I was not to grow in height, at least to develop what there was of me to the utmost, and for this purpose I would twirl and twist upon the bough of a tree for a full hour, or row half-way across the Firth, although, by reason of doubtful craft and English ships which played the spy, it was not over, safe to venture far from shore; or I would seek birds' eggs and try to shoot sea-fowl with a pistol I had stolen from a drawer in my father's bureau. Above all, however, I loved to strip, and disport in the clear, green depths which washed the rocky beach, till I became almost a fish and could dart and turn and dive, I say it though I am a modest man, in wondrous fashion.

I had none with whom to share these pleasures, however, for the other boys held aloof, though I tried for long to join in their games and sports. They had a fear of me, and some even whispered I had the evil eye, and at last I grew to hate them, and in the bitterness of my heart I would go off for some long ramble in solitary state, brooding, ever brooding, on my trouble, and strengthening my arms against the time when I should have the flogging of their children.

Thus it came about that one day in late autumn I started for a walk by the shore, but I might have known better than to go, for signs of a gale were not wanting.

In the early morning it had been over clear across the Firth, and the lion hill, which stands near the town of Edinburgh, had shown up distinctly, as though but a few miles off, while the Law of Berwick was plainer still.

The clouds had gathered as the day wore on, and the wind, coming in gusts and rain squalls at the first, had gained in force till, when I had been an hour upon the road, it was roaring on shore, and shrieking and whistling through the tree tops, the dying leaves whirling in clouds before it.

I was in a bitter mood that day, for the next week sports and a bull-baiting were to be held upon the green, but when I had offered to run in a foot race, being anxious to gain a prize, the folk had laughed at me mightily and taunted me with my short legs, till I had much ado to keep my fists quiet. No wonder, then, that I felt a wild joy in buffeting and striving against the wind blasts and cared not a jot for the slash of the rain and the nip of the sea-spray. I battled on heedless of it all, with head bent and teeth set, till I was eight miles away from Kirkcaldy at a place where the shore was wild and rugged with great rock reefs running seawards, jagged and evil looking.

Even I was thinking of seeking shelter, for the mist was gathering thick and it was growing colder, when, on a sudden, from the Firth there came the boom of a gun and then another. I strained my eyes seawards and strove to pierce the gloom, but I could see naught, and was turning to reach the woods, when I caught sight of a gleam of light like a flash of flame, and then again there came the sullen boom.

At the same moment the mist seemed to lift and lighten, and there, scarce a hundred yards from the end of the line of reef, was a great ship with two tall masts, square rigged and high pooped, tossing and rolling on the grey and angry sea.

As I stared at her in wonder there came a wild cry across the water, and she swung heavily round till I could see the guns grinning from her ports and the yellow streak which ran along her hull, till she lay washing and wobbling in the trough of the waves, and her sails taken aback were



SCARCE A HUNDRED YARDS FROM THE END OF THE LINE OF REEF WAS A GREAT SHIP

flattened against her masts. Then slowly answering to her helm her head swung outwards and rounded away from me, her canvas filled and flapped again, and then there came a furious blast driving the mist and rain before it and shrouding the great ship from my sight, but I stood waiting in horror, for, ere the mist had closed around her, I had seen her head falling off again, and knew that if the blast lasted she was lost.

The wind lulled, but only for a moment, and then down it came again more wild and fierce than ever, and borne on it there came to my ears that which sent me scrambling and staggering out upon the long, black reef which ran seawards between the great, grey, froth-topped waves, for a wild cry of dismay, the shriek and wail of lost souls came shoreward on the wind, rising above the howling of the gale and the boom and splash of the billows on the weed-grown rocks.

I clambered on, soaking and breathless, but had scarce managed fifty yards, when, from the gloom in front, there came a crashing, grinding, rending sound, and then another cry, and then silence save for the voice of wind and waves and the screech of frightened sea-fowl blown like feathers before the tempest.

I crouched under the lee of a rock, for the tide was nearly full and the water formed a belt cutting the reef in two, across which I must needs swim if I wished to go onwards.

I was minded to go, for I felt strangely excited and the breath was come back to me, but, as I crept from behind my shelter I saw sure sign of the deadly work of reef, and wind, and wave.

Pieces of wreckage warped with tangled rope were surging shoreward, hurrying forwards on the rollers, and slipping back into the hollows, driven hither and thither and vanishing into the mist which lay low upon the sea.

I watched them come and go from sight, mostly timbers from the ship's upper works with stays and ratlines streaming from and round them, but after a little while a mast with broken cross-trees came into view, washing and slobbering heavily, the breakers bursting in spray upon it and hurling it forwards like a drunken thing.

I was likening it in my mind to Geordie Ramsay half-full of 'the kingdom' being pushed and hustled homewards by the worthies who formed the night watch of Kirkcaldy, when my heart gave a bound, for I could have sworn something moved upon the mast. Forming my hands into a shield for my mouth I hulloaed with all my might, and waited.

I had not been mistaken. A dark form clinging to the cross-trees moved again and waved an arm in the air, but at that moment the heavy mast was lifted by the swell, and then came thumping downwards, pitching over the while, and I could almost fancy, though it was seventy yards away, that I could hear it splash and gurgle.

When it righted again—if indeed you can call it righting—the figure was gone, but close to the mast was a black spot which I took to be a man's head.

Now, I saw that the swimmer had but little chance of gaining his refuge again, and, moreover, I thought that if Providence let him get near the heavy mass of timber it might crack his skull and send him to the bottom, therefore being, as I say, excited and still a trifle bitter in my mind, I did what at any other time I should have shrunk from doing, I doffed my doublet and kicking off my heavy shoes, I jumped clear of the weed and wrack into the sea.

Good luck! an I had known a tenth part of the breaker's strength I would have thought twice before venturing amongst them, but, being in, I was not minded to turn back, and truly I think my shortness helped me, there being less of leverage for the waves to work upon.

My plan was to get the drowning man, for clearly he must have drowned if left to himself, to the strip of quiet water intersecting the reef and there to land him, but I had much ado to find him in the first place, catching glimpses of his head only when I let myself rise upon a roller, for, as a rule, I dived through the walls of water, finding it easier and being more used to it.

At last, after being half choked and deafened by the surge, I got close to the swimmer and saw he was a man, and an old one.

He was saving himself, lying on his back and but barely keeping himself afloat, so that I took care to come upon

him quietly from behind. He started mightily when I took him below the shoulders, but I shouted in his ear that I would save him if he kept as he was, and he said not a word but lay still. I soon found, fool that I was, that I would have little to do with the saving, for I could make no headway towards the reef, and the great waves washed us like wreckage nearer and nearer to the shore.

'Two lives instead of one,' I thought, and then fell to wondering if any would grieve for the loss of Jeremy, the Squat, but having made up my mind that none would, I straightway resolved that, God willing, none should have the chance, and braced myself for a struggle when we reached the rocks. Nor were we long in reaching the same, but to me it seemed a year, for the weight of the body on my arms grew every moment greater, and it was hard to breathe, and harder still to keep the surface.

But I was not born to be drowned—at least, not then—and as the boom of the breakers sounded louder, I half turned, and to my joy, away to the right, I saw a spot where the line of foam was broken. Clearly a gully ran in between the rocks, but how it ended, whether in cliff or sand I knew not, all I knew was, that reach it I must or be ground to pulp. I kicked out vigorously, and struggled and battled, and at last found that I had worked my way opposite the place, and that the waves were carrying us fast towards it.

I remember seeing the black rocks on either hand as we rolled into the gully on a breaker's crest, and then there came a swirl and a back-draw, something struck me on the head and I knew no more.

When I came to myself it had grown dark, and I felt a dizziness in my head and a strange sick feeling, but for all that I made out that I was lying under an overhanging crag, and some distance off a man was sitting on the ground rubbing away at something in his hands. He turned, and rising, came close to me, and then I saw he was the man who had been upon the mast, and that he had been polishing a long rapier with a handful of wet sand. I had but a faint idea of what had happened, and therefore strove to ask him, but as he afterwards told me the first words I said to him were,

'Who am I?'

I can even remember the dull surprise I felt when he answered in a strange accent,—

‘God knows what you are, for neither in the heavens above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth, have I seen anything like you, but this I know that you can swim like a fish and have a skull like an Ethiopian’s, otherwise you would have been a corpse by this time, and for that matter so should I.’

Then I smiled at him, for, as I have said, he had a strange way of speaking, and a stranger one of raising his shoulders and spreading out his hands, but even as I smiled a drowsy feeling came over me, his figure faded from my sight and I slept. When I woke for the second time the sun was already high in the heavens, and all trace of the last day’s turmoil was gone, save for a heavy ground swell which broke slowly on the beach, and pieces of timber and other wreckage strewn hither and thither upon the rocks.

A short way off a little fire was burning briskly, and the shipwrecked man was sitting cross-legs before it cooking something as my eyes and nose soon told me. I felt better and turned on my side, but at the noise I made the man looked up and nodded and smiled at me.

‘Ah, *mon ami*,’ he said, ‘so you have deigned to wake. Truly I thought you were sleeping the sleep of the just, but be still, and you shall have something in good time.’

I was not loth to follow his advice, for I felt my head still sore, and small wonder, there being a great cut across the back of it into which my hair had stuck.

I had now a better chance of seeing him and made the most of it, for if he had seen nothing like me neither had I seen anyone like him, for strangers were rare in Kirkcoun.

He was an old man, at least to me, being grey-headed, though his pointed beard and long moustachios showed only a streak of white here and there, being, for the most part, black in colour. His hair was close cropped, and his face, much tanned with the sun. He had brown eyes and a hooked nose, while his mouth I could not see, but judged it to be thin lipped and large. For the rest he had an undervest laced in front and pointed, and his shirt, which had once been white, was much discoloured, though he must have dried it while I slept.

He had great puffs slashed with silk upon the thighs, and wore trunk hose of a dark hue fitting very tight, and withal, elegantly, though he was a trifle spindle-shanked.

Indeed, all over he looked thin but wiry, and in height was above middle stature, yet not tall.

What struck me with surprise was that he should have kept to his sword, which he wore slantwise on his hip, fastened to a belt round his middle.

I was still watching him when he rose.

'Ugh,' he said with a shrug, 'it is cold despite the sun, canst rise, think you?'

I tried, and found I could stand and walk fairly well, while my clothes having dried on me did not trouble me overmuch.

He stared very hard at me when I was upon my feet, and I heard him mutter to himself, '*Mon Dieu!*' from the which I judged him a Frenchman, and liked him the less because of it, for many had come over with the Queen, and there were still some I had heard who fattened on the land.

Howbeit, when I had bathed my head at a little stream which fell over the cliff and lost itself in the sand, and when he showed me that what he had cooked was a portion of salted meat taken from a cask which had come ashore, I ceased to think of him and fell to in earnest, being consumed with a mighty hunger.

'*Mon Dieu!*' I heard him say again when I had finished, and this time I asked him what he meant.

'Well,' said he, and he looked steadily at me the while, 'your own father could not call you large, and yet you have eaten more in this one meal than I have ever done in three days.'

'Everyone to his own taste,' said I, 'perchance if you had eaten more, your legs had been thicker.'

He looked angry for a moment and then burst into a great roar of laughter.

'I have spitted a man for less,' he said, 'but we must not quarrel, for if I saved you yester night, yet had I not come near the shore without your help, tell me how are you named?'

'My name is Jeremy Clephane,' said I, 'and I am from Kirkcoun.'

'Kirktown?' he said, making a mess of the name; 'and where may that be?'

'It is some eight miles to the westward on the shore,' I answered.

'And what shore?'

'Fife.'

'*Diable!*' he said, 'so we are on the north coast of this accursed firth—so much for Monsieur le capitaine's knowledge,' and he sat and thought awhile.

'And may I ask, sir, who you may be?' I made bold to ask him, 'and the name of the ship which went on the shore last night?'

'Truly, you may,' he said, twirling his moustachios and staring at me with a droll look in his eyes. 'I am a gentleman of France, and the ship hailed from the same fair country.'

Now I saw he had no wish to tell me, but nevertheless I asked him another question.

'How am I to call you, though?'

'Call me!' he said, 'why, call me by my name!'

Which is?'

'De Cusac—Monsieur de Cusac,' said he, with a bow, 'and at your service.'

There was something in his eyes which warned me not to press him further, and as I sat and watched him, it came to my mind that there was school that day and that if I were late I had my father to reckon with, therefore I jumped up and tightened my waistband.

'Whither away?' said the Frenchman.

'I have school to go to,' I said.

'School!' he said, in a surprised tone, 'what do you with schools here? Is this Kirktown a big place?'

'Nay,' I answered, 'it is but a village.'

'Well, well,' he muttered, 'I wonder not the priests have a sad time of it in this land. Adieu, lad, and I thank you for your brave act yester night.'

'But are you not coming with me?' I asked him.

'To Kirktown?'

'Yes.'

'*Ma foi!* not I,' he answered, 'when I find a place to my taste there I stay. But see, you lad, tell naught of this and come hither on the morrow.'

‘But I shall be asked where I have been and what I have been doing, and if I do not answer I shall be flogged.’

At that he laughed.

‘Methinks that would not hurt you much,’ he said, ‘and what is more you are no stranger to a lie. Adieu till we meet again!’

Now I turned and went away wondering, for, as I live, he had spoken truth.

CHAPTER III

OF THE NAKED MAN AND THE MARK OF THE FIRE

I THINK it hardly needful to set down the manner of reception which awaited me when I crept in at the school-house door, for anyone who, as a boy, has ever been late will know full well how I felt ten minutes after my arrival, and will understand what difficulty I had in sitting square upon my seat. Nevertheless, I managed to keep my secret, for when my father asked me what I had been doing, my head was still so muddled and confused that, forgetting it was autumn, I answered that I had been bird's-nesting, whereat everyone but myself laughed so much that I was asked no more questions. You will wonder, perhaps, that being now nearly nineteen years old I was still at school and liable to be flogged, but the truth is that no one, myself included, ever thought I was nearing man's estate, albeit there was a darkish shade upon my upper lip, and I was broader than any man in Kirkcaldy, and thereby looked shorter than I really was.

That day, however, it dawned upon me that I was getting beyond school, and the same night I talked with my father. I can see him yet as he sat at the square oaken table with his Bible and a jorum of 'the kingdom' beside him; a great man with bushy eyebrows and a face clean shaven, his chin massive and clean-cut, and his dress plain and severe—such as the Reformers affected.

I stood before him with my hands behind my back and waited, for I knew he ever liked to have the first word.

'Well, my son,' he said, after he had taken a huge draught from the tankard at his elbow, 'well?'

'I think, father,' said I, 'that I am growing too old for school, and for being flogged before boys.'

'A boy before boys,' he said.

'Nay,' said I, 'I am hardly a boy now.'

'It is true,' said he, 'I had not thought of it. Art sore, my son?'

'Verily that I am,' I answered.

'Is it so,' he said, 'but methought you had taken care of that, my son?'

Now I felt my face grow red, for I did not know that he had found the dried weed wherewith I had made me a careful padding.

'I had done so,' said I, 'but the weed slipped downwards.'

He smiled at this as if he was well pleased, and then sat silent a long while.

'Sit down,' he said at length, 'and we will talk of this.'

'Nay, father,' I made answer, 'I had rather stand, an' it please you.'

He smiled again at this and took another draught.

'I think, my son,' he said, 'that you are right, for, to say truth, you know too much to be at school, and, moreover, God has gifted you with strength which might prove a danger to you there.'

'How do you know that, father?' I asked, for I had always exercised alone and never struggled when he thrashed me.

'You forget, my son, that I held you by the arm to-day,' he said, and again he smiled. 'Now listen to me,' he continued, bending forwards, 'you know the classics and I am growing old and have need of help, what say you to helping me?' and he added, looking at me queerly, 'you shall have all the floggings to yourself, only deal gently, Jeremy, deal gently, as I have ever done.'

'Father,' I said, 'I am willing, but I had a fall yesterday which has hurt my head so that I cannot work, therefore, I prithee, let me have a month to myself, and then I will help you at the school.'

'A month,' he said, 'and why a month?'

'Because,' I answered, for I knew he loved one to quote the Bible, 'because much study is a weariness of the flesh.'

'I think, Jeremy,' he said slowly, 'I rather think you have a brain as well as arms, but so be it, lad, so be it, and now to bed.'

If, reader, you have brains as well as arms, you will not

wonder that I asked a month of spare time, for I longed to find out the mystery of this Frenchman and why he had a preference for staying on a cold and oftentimes wet beach when, for all he knew, he might have had a bed in Kirkcaldy.

It puzzled me also how he was to find food, for he looked like a man who loved dainty fare, and, God knows! salted ship's meat is poor comfort for any stomach.

Therefore, next morning, having seen my father take up his books and staff and set off up the hill, I took the pistol, or, as it was then called, the dag, and having cleaned it, I stuck it in my belt, and taking somewhat to eat and a supply of powder and of shot, I took the shore road to the east. It was but rough, a mere path, now running along by the rocks, now half-way up the wooded cliffs which were a tangle of briar, rowan, ash and birch, and over two hours had passed ere I was at the spot where the road turned downwards to the bay, on the beach of which I had left the Frenchman.

I caught sight of him before I was half-way down the steep path, but would hardly have known him for the same man. He was wearing a hat with a long feather in it, and had a cloak of purple velvet hanging from his shoulders, while his shirt was new and clean.

To be sure I did not see all this at once, for when I first caught sight of him he was stooping over a dark object which lay upon the sand by the water's edge, and when I got near enough I saw it was a corpse, terribly beaten and discoloured, the body of a seaman, to judge from his dress and the silver whistle fastened to a leathern cord which hung round his thick-set neck.

The Frenchman had seen me coming, and nodded to me as I came up with him.

'Here is one of the under officers of that ill-fated ship,' said he to me, 'a worthy man, no doubt, and the only one who has come ashore as yet.'

'Then we had best bury him,' said I.

'Without doubt,' he answered, 'but first we will take from him what he has no need of,' and he took the silver whistle with the cord from the dead man's neck. 'His pockets, I grieve to say, are empty, *mon ami*, so we may bury him now, and God rest his soul!'

Now, I did not overmuch like his searching of the dead, and still less his prayer for him, so I said nothing, but helped with a sharpened stake to scoop out a shallow grave for the drowned mariner, and there we laid him to his rest. After we had done, Mousieur de Cusac, as he called himself, took a pipe from an inner pocket of his cloak, and having filled it, squatted down with his back against a rock and began to smoke. I watched him wondering, for in those days there were few who used the weed, and I had seen but three men do the like before, and even of them but one had smoked a pipe.

Now some may tell you that at this time the weed was scarcely used at all, and speak much of Sir Walter Raleigh and his doings, but, I pray you, ask them if they were living in the days of which I write, and when they answer nay—as they needs must, lay your finger to your nose in a manner I shall speak of in due course, and I warrant they will say little more—but to my tale.

‘You wonder my friend,’ said De Cusac to me at length, ‘where I got these gay feathers and this pipe?’

I nodded.

‘If you go to the crag there,’ he continued, ‘you will find a small chest which came ashore through the night, and, mayhap, you will find something in it to your taste. Methinks you would look well in a peaked cap of Flemish cloth, and there is such an one in the box.’

‘I wish no dead men’s clothes, Monsieur de Cusac,’ I answered.

‘Then may God forgive you for a wasteful boy!—but if I mistake not,’ he said slowly, and with a drawl, ‘there is also a rapier in the box, for it is a long one and holds—’ but I did not hear him end his sentence, for I was half-way to the crag, and I heard him laugh as I ran.

I found the sword lying among the cloth stuffs—a long, thin blade tapering to a fine point, and with a handle like a cross. I lifted it out and returned with it to the Frenchman.

‘Now, in truth, you look like a blood-sucker, Master Clephane,’ said De Cusac. ‘What with that wheel-lock and the rapier, you are as fair a warrior as I have ever seen.’

I knew he was but jesting with me, yet I pretended to think he was in earnest.

'It may be so,' I said, 'but what use is a sword an' one knows not how to use it?'

'True, oh Solon,' he said, 'true, but look you, Master Clephane, no one ever did De Cusac a good turn and was the worse of it, therefore, if you keep my presence here a secret, I will even teach you how to use your sword, and mayhap something more, and, believe, me, I am no mean hand with the weapon, as some few have found in days gone by.'

'If you will answer me one thing,' I said, 'I will do as you wish.'

'And what may that be?'

'You are not here with any intent against this country or its people?'

'Heaven bless you, *mon garçon*!' he said, 'I would not hurt a blade of grass of the first, or a hair of the heads of the second. I am here for purposes of my own and that only.'

'And this on your honour?' I asked.

'Even on my honour, Master Clephane,' he said, taking he pipe from his mouth and bowing low.

'Then,' said I, 'we may even begin.'

'*Mon Dieu*!' he cried, 'am I not even to finish my pipe-fill? Methinks, by the time you are of my age, you will have had enough of swords. Are you of noble birth Master Clephane?'

'My uncle is Sir Roger Clephane of Connel,' I answered, 'and had it not been for a plot in which my grandfather took part, my father had been Sir Hal Clephane, and myself, Sir Jeremy, but he was outlawed and lost his title and lands, and my father cared for neither.'

'Your father is—?'

'A schoolmaster.'

'*Mon Dieu*!' he said, 'You are a strange race, you Scotch, but as I am finished, Sir Jeremy, we will have our first lesson, for, as you see, I have turned schoolmaster also.'

'A moment, sir,' I said.

'Well?' he queried.

'I had rather not be called by that name, monsieur.'

'I crave your pardon, Master Clephane,' he answered,

bowing again, 'I will bear it in mind, and now, stand here and cross your sword with mine so, your leg out thus, and your body bent in this fashion,' and there and then I had my first lesson in the art.

'You will make a great swordsman yet,' he said, when we had finished, 'for, by Saint Anthony, you have a devil of a reach and are quick on your feet! Were you but a foot taller, I would not care to face you two months hence.' I was mightily pleased with his praise, and thanked him for his lesson, after which he told me tales of wars, and kings, and strange lands, and I listened to him till I felt the thought of living at Kirkcoun and teaching at the school grow flat and distasteful to me; when I told him I had better go, and when he asked me why, and heard my reason, he whistled and shrugged his shoulders.

'I rather think, Master Clephane,' he said, 'that you have brains under that thick skull of yours.'

Now I bade him farewell and went away wondering, for here, in a few hours' time, I had twice been told that I had brains.

Truly, I began to think there must be truth in it. The Frenchman called after me to know what I would do with the sword.

'I have a safe place for it,' I called back, and he said no more; but taking out his pipe, sat down against the rock, and the last I saw of him that day was the thin curl of blue smoke rising from his pipe bowl, as with his knees up to his chin, he sat and gazed across the Firth.

It would but weary you, I fear, if I were to tell you how every morning found me on the beach with this strange man. I brought food to him at odd times, helped him to fish, and to build a rude hut under the crag—as also to bury ten more bodies which came ashore, each of which he most carefully examined, and did not seem over pleased with the result. Indeed, it seemed to me as if he was looking for some special corpse and could not find it, and I wondered if that was what kept him on the beach. I thought, moreover, that if he was to wait till it came shorewards, his beard might grow as grey as his head ere he left.

Nevertheless, he seemed to enjoy his life, and was ever in good spirits when he gave me my lesson, praising me

when I did well, and rating me soundly when I failed to parry a thrust or missed a wrist stroke, for, as I should have stated before, he had fixed a button on each rapier's point after a clever fashion, and so there was no danger to either of us ; otherwise, I should at first have died ten times in the course of a lesson, though after two weeks had passed, he ran a chance of being spitted more than once.

I say it would weary you to set all this down at length, suffice to say that a month came and went and I was back at school again, though this time as a dominie, without discovering a whit more about this Frenchman, save that on a piece of carved timber which came ashore I found the name, *Hibou*, painted in yellow letters, and judged it to be the name of the ill-fated ship.

Although I was busy at school, yet I had time late each day ere it grew dark to go to meet him ; and my father said nothing to it, but now and then asked me if I were finding many eggs, and if I ate them all.

Strange to say, having now the chance, I cared not for flogging the boys, but managed to keep them in order without it, after I had soundly thrashed the biggest of them who thought to dispute authority with me.

My father would wonder at me and shake his head, but I think the trouble which later carried him off was settling on him, for he would sit for hours doing nothing, and even forget the tankard at his elbow.

I grieved for this, but could do little, for now and again when I asked him if I could do aught he turned on me in a fury and struck at me viciously.

Therefore I sent privately for a sister of his, who came and had a power of managing him, so I felt eased in my mind.

It was two months now since the *Hibou*—if that was the ship's name—had been wrecked, and the winter had set in strongly, so that I did not wonder one day when De Cusac told me he was going away. At the same time I had my doubts whether the winter was the sole cause of his going, for two events had occurred which had set me thinking.

It happened one day that, going to meet him earlier than was my wont, I could not find him on the beach, and wondered where he might be, till at last I made him

out at the end of the long reef about which I have told you before.

Now there was nothing strange in this, for it was an excellent place for codlings and all rock fish; but what was strange was that he should have been stark naked, and a bitter east wind blowing up the Firth.

I saw him start when I hulloaed to him, and he waved to me to wait upon the beach for him.

I watched him dress and pick his way cannily along the reef, but if he was angry he did not show it when he reached me.

'Ah, *mon ami*,' he said 'had I known it was so cold, I should not have bathed; but your seas here are colder than in France.'

'So I should think,' I answered drily, for I knew he lied to me, as what man would have bathed on a day when the wind, let alone the sea, chilled you to the marrow, and especially a man who, to my knowledge, had not bathed since I had first seen him; for he had had a little crust of blood on his right temple upon that first night and it was there still, and what was more the dirt had stuck to it, so that from being red, it had turned black like the colour of his nail-tips.

Moreover, does a man dry himself with a cloak of velvet or a linen shirt?

Now he saw I doubted him and flared into a sudden rage.

'*Mon Dieu!*' he said, 'you think I lied to you? Draw, sir, draw, and I will teach you to doubt my word.'

Seeing he was in earnest I drew my sword and stood on guard, resolving not to touch him but to weary him if I could—for with all his strange ways, and despite his being a Papist, I liked this Frenchman. He came at me fiercely, and there was no button on the point of either rapier, but I foiled him a dozen times, and then, seeing my chance, by a quick turn of the wrist—a trick I had learned from him—I sent his sword flying twenty paces away.

In a moment his anger died out and he laughed, but a trifle sadly.

'I might have known it,' he said, 'it is time for old birds to roost,' and as I looked at him I could see that there were tears in his eyes.

'Nay, Monsieur de Cusac,' I said, 'it was but a chance—a lucky chance.'

'You are kind, *mon garçon*,' he answered, 'but I know when I am beaten, in two months' time you have mastered your master. Well, so be it, I can teach you no more.'

Nevertheless we would practice every day after that for there was fever in the village, and the school did not meet. I say we practiced till the second event of which I have spoken occurred, and it came about in this wise.

I think I have not told you that the little sandy shore, where we had built the hut and buried the seamen, was flanked on its eastern side by a wall of rock which ran outwards as a point into the sea, though not so far as the reef whereon the ship had struck. It happened that one day, when we were fishing from the reef and getting good sport with gurnards and rock-cod, De Cusac suddenly rose to his feet, letting his line go, and it would have been lost for it was weighted, had I not snatched at it. Shading his eyes with his hand he gazed at the wall of rock, which from being about eight feet at the water's edge rose to twenty feet where it joined the cliff.

'Look, Jeremy,' he said, 'your eyes are younger than mine; do you see anything above the rock wall yonder?'

I looked and saw against the clear sky close to and beyond the cliff a thin stream of smoke rising upwards, for there was little wind.

'There is smoke there,' I said.

'And smoke means?'

'A fire surely.'

'*Mon Dieu !*' I heard him mutter.

'How may one get over the rock there without being seen?' he presently asked. 'Can one climb the wall at the cliff?'

'No,' I answered, 'a cat could not go up it; the only way is to go up the path I come down and along through the woods to the cliff edge beyond the wall of rock.'

'Is your pistol loaded?' he said.

'No,' I answered.

'Then load it.'

I did so, and without a word he turned and walked quickly towards the path. It was a hard scramble through

the dense thickets, and our clothes were torn and our hands scratched and bleeding ere we reached the cliff edge beyond the rock wall.

'Carefully now,' said De Cusac, as I lay flat and looked down upon the shore; 'make no noise, and see you do not slip.'

In another moment I was staring down upon the sand and stones which formed the beach.

'There is no smoke,' I said, 'and no fire and no person.'

'What!' he whispered and lay down beside me. 'You do not know how to use your eyes, Jeremy,' he said, 'see you that flat slate-coloured stone?'

I nodded.

'What do you see upon it?'

'Nothing,' said I, 'save a black mark.'

'Just so, and that same black mark is sure sign of a fire. There has been a fire lit there more than once, Jeremy, and a fire does not light itself, but let us back to the bay for this troubles me.'

When we had returned to the hut he sat silent for a long time, muttering to himself now and again, and at last he turned to me and said, 'You had better go, Jeremy, but first leave me your pistol, I may find use for it.'

Now, I having no use for it—as I had long since found it easier to kill sea fowl with a sling than with the cumbersome dag—was well pleased to leave it with him, and bidding him farewell, I walked slowly homewards, wondering what strange thing might happen next.

CHAPTER IV

OF THE SECOND MAN, THE BROWN BOX, AND THE MADNESS THAT CAME UPON KIRKTOWN

IT was upon the day following this adventure that De Cusac told me he was going, and he seemed worried and anxious in his mind. I felt sad when he told me, for I wondered how I should occupy my time without him, and he seemed to guess my thought for he said,—

‘I am sorry I cannot take you with me, Jeremy, for I cannot yet beat you at the wrist stroke, but this wreck has altered all my plans and I must go alone.’

‘But how are you to go?’ I asked him.

‘*Diablo!*’ said he, ‘that is the question.’

‘Whither do you wish to go?’ I said.

‘If I had wings,’ he answered, ‘I would shape a course for Leith, but not having wings I must even go elsewhere.’

‘By no means,’ said I.

‘What do you mean?’ he asked, looking at me sharply.

‘Well, I can get a fast sailing skiff from old Ebe the boatman and sail hither, then I will take you aboard and make for Leith, and no one a whit the wiser.’

‘You can get this boat?’ he said.

‘Assuredly; I have often sailed her.’

He thought awhile, beating with his foot upon the ground.

‘It is the best plan,’ he at length said; ‘how long will it take you to be here with the boat?’

‘Three hours at the least,’ I answered, ‘but will you go to-day?’

‘The sooner the better, Jeremy,’ he said. ‘Do you go for this skiff and I will meet you here; it is a fine, calm day and the breeze favours us.’

I hurried home and soon had the boat from old Ebe,

who I think had somewhat of a liking for me, being a squat man himself. She was a fast little craft, half decked, and once I was beyond the harbour mouth she sped along merrily enough and I had time to think as I sat in the stern with one hand grasping the sheet and the other the tiller.

I thought over all that had taken place in the last two months, and wondered what De Cusac had found to keep him on the shore all that long time. It could not be to find a special corpse, for the last had been washed ashore a month ago, and the rest of the crew, by this time must have become food for the fishes, and would never again be seen by mortal man; at least this side of the judgment day. I wondered if there had been treasure on the ship for De Cusac had assuredly been searching for something that day I found him naked on the reef and a cold wind blowing. It looked likely, but still I was not certain, and I believed him when he said he was there on his own account. It is true that there was many a plot being hatched, for Queen Mary was in an English prison, and we were not so much out of the world at Kirkcubright but that we heard something of the doings in England.

For all that I judged that De Cusac had told me the truth, and when I had ceased wondering why he had stayed so long upon the beach, I took to thinking on the events of the day before—the Frenchman's anxiety and the mark of the fire.

I was brought back to the present by the breeze freshening, and it needed some skill in tacking to run along the shore line, so that nearly four hours had passed since I left De Cusac till I rounded the reef and had the bay in sight again.

I was hardly round it when the crack of a pistol-shot reached my ears and I looked quickly to the shore, and then I had just mind enough to keep from shouting out, for where I had left one man there were now two.

One was De Cusac, the other a far bigger man, as I could even see from the boat. They were facing each other and had swords in their hands, while between them on the sand lay something small and brown.

De Cusac must have fired the dag and missed with it, I

thought, then, wild with excitement, I trimmed the boat to catch every breath of wind and let her go.

I watched them breathlessly, and neither of them noticed me, their swords circling rapidly as they thrust and parried.

Nearer and nearer to the shore got the skiff till I could see that the big man was wounded in the cheek, perhaps by the ball from the dag, and that the dark object between them was a little box. Would I be in time? I thought, as the water rippled and gurgled under the skiff's keel and a wake of frothy white stretched out behind her.

I could hear the click, click of their rapiers now, but still I was unnoticed.

De Cusac was pressing the big man and I could have shouted as I saw him get within his guard, but the stranger quickly jerked back his body and was uninjured.

And then as I watched them I saw the new-comer kick the box against De Cusac's legs, and the Frenchman staggered and fell forwards while the other lunged at him. I closed my eyes a second, for I had never seen a man die, and when I opened them De Cusac was stretched upon the ground and his victor was coolly wiping his sword on the Frenchman's cloak, which had been lying close by upon the sand.

As he finished cleaning it, however, he chanced to look sideways and in a moment saw the skiff. His face grew pale with fear, and snatching up the box he ran at full speed across the shore and reached the rock wall just as the skiff's prow grated on the sand.

'I have the villain,' I thought, and leapt ashore with my sword drawn, letting the skiff look after itself and running past De Cusac's body. But as I rushed after him as fast as my legs would carry me, the man vanished into a thicket at the base of the rock wall and the cliff, and when I reached it he was gone.

Rashly enough I plunged into the undergrowth, but there was no sign of him, and nothing beyond the thicket but the smooth face of the cliff. I peered here and there and ran my sword into any likely spot, but he had gone as if spirited away, and a great fear fell upon me.

'He must have been the devil,' I muttered, and would have crossed myself had I been a Papist. Not being one,

however, I did nothing but stare at the rock wall where he had vanished.

Then I remembered that if this man was gone, De Cusac was still left, and I ran back to him, but a glance was enough. The Frenchman was dead, run through the heart it seemed to me, and a little stream of blood was still trickling from his mouth, though it had clotted on his dark beard.

I stood like one stunned, and then—I take no shame in saying it—I burst out crying like a child.

It was no wonder. I had few friends, and for two months I had known this man, and, in his way, he had been kind to me, and had taught me much. Therefore, it is no marvel I wept, but after a time I brushed away my tears, and following his own maxim, I searched him, but found nothing save a little case of gold, in which was a lock of fair hair, and the silver whistle he had taken from the dead mariner.

I have them both before me as I write, and even now I think with sadness of this strange man who died taking his secret with him. All I could do for him now I did. I buried him and his sword with him close to his little hut, and as I shovelled in the sand I muttered, 'God rest his soul!' for I knew he would have liked it, albeit it was a useless prayer, for, as I opine, when a man is dead, he *is* dead, and that for good or for evil.

When he was below the sand I set the great chest and the clothing in it upon his grave, and picking up the dag, I loaded it and again I went into the thicket, but could find no trace of him I sought, albeit I vowed that if I met him either in this world or the next, he would have cause to remember Jeremy the Squat and the man he had foully slain on the shore of Fife.

Now, when I had made an end of searching for De Cusac's murderer, for he was nothing less, I left the hut standing, and taking with me nothing but the rapier and the dag, I got on board the skiff again, which all the time had been lying broadside on the shore with flapping sail, grinding her keel upon the sand.

I pushed her off and took a last look at the spot where I had spent many a pleasant, if curious, day, then choking down a lump which rose in my throat, I ran the skiff out of

the bay and so homeward, stopping only to hide my rapier in a convenient thicket on the shore, for none in Kirktown had ever seen me with a sword, and knew not I could use one.

Old Ebe was waiting for me, but I had little heart to speak to him, and went slowly homewards, feeling strangely older for having seen a man die, and half-wondering if I was the same Jeremy who had left Kirktown but a few hours before. That night, when it had grown dark, I went and fetched the sword from where I had hidden it, and ever after kept it by me, but I fell into my old ways, strengthening myself in secret, carving at wood and teaching at the school, where, strange to say, the boys had taken a liking for me, and did the work with willingness for the most part.

Gradually, as I say, I slipped back into the old grooves, taking pleasure in fishing from the jetty, and learning something of Spanish from old Ebe, who had been in foreign parts, and could swear strange oaths, and tell queer tales; only now and then I would take out the rapier from the recess where I had kept it hidden, and going to an upper room I would put myself in position as De Cusac had shown me, and for a long half-hour would thrust and parry, guard and lunge as I had been wont to do with the man who lay under the wet sand upon the lonely wave-beaten shore.

Though I mixed little with the lads of my own age, and spoke rarely to them, save only to wish them good-morrow, or give them my opinion as to the weather, and, indeed, they looked up to me as knowing much, and this, I think, because I kept silent and spoke little, for as King Solomon hath it, 'He that refraineth his lips is wise,' I say, though I was little with them, yet, for all that, I knew most of what was passing in Kirktown, and one day, when there was a balmy feel as of spring in the air, I found that most, if not all, of the village lads had suddenly gone mad, for so I deemed it, raving about a maid who had come to Kirktown, or, to be more precise, to near Kirktown, for she was named Mistress Marjorie Bethune, and was the only child of old Andrew Bethune, the laird of Crookness, who had, when but a youth, been forced to fly the country, and had lived ever since in Switzerland it was said, but had now come back to die in peace in his own land, though he had left his wife

buried under foreign soil. It was said that when he had found the state into which his acres had fallen, he had cursed mightily, for everyone had taken his pleasure in the grounds of Crookness, and the village sports were every year held in one of the fields which had been called 'The Green,' there being no one to say nay, and then his hedges had been broken down, his pigeon tower rifled, as I know full well, and his fruit, or what remained of it, stolen.

We in Kirkcoun soon learned that there was to be an end of all this, for the house was put in order, and boards were set up with notices which few could read, warning those who would trespass and threatening them withal, while Laird Bethune settled down to breed cattle, and grow crops and hedges, and of these same cattle I shall have more to say, as will in time be seen. It was a spring morning, as I have said, on which I found that this strange madness had come upon the village, for, as carrying my books, I left the house alone to climb the hill to the school, my father being taken with a bad turn, I met Dick Ramsay, of whose teeth and drunken father I have before made mention, and who now owned three fishing boats, and, though young, had thriven well and was a man of substance.

'Tis a fine day,' said I, and hurried on, being a trifle late.

'It is,' he snuffled, having an impediment in his speech, by reason of his teeth, no doubt, and then called out after me, 'Jeremy, I say, Jeremy?'

But I paid no heed to him and kept on.

'Master Clephane,' he shouted louder, but still I held on my way. 'Dominie,' he cried, and I stopped and, turning, asked him what he wanted.

'Hast heard the news?' he snuffled.

'What news?' said I.

'Oh, then, you have not,' he said, looking down at me with a fine air of knowledge.

'An' you would say which news,' I answered, being angered at his bearing, 'I might tell you. Dost mean that Elizabeth is dead, that the Spaniards have landed in Cornwall, or that the Queen is set free?'

Now, being a fool and thick-brained despite his three boats, he saw not that I jested with him, and gaped like a fowl that has eaten a worm of great body.

'I knew not all this,' he said staring at me.

'Then, pray, what did you know?' I asked him.

'Why, that Andrew Bethune has come back to Crookness.'

'The devil he has,' said I, for the bell had ceased ringing, 'and is this what you have kept me to say?'

'Nay, dominie,' he snuffled, 'but his daughter has come with him.'

'And is that strange?' said I.

'I shall tell you no more,' he said, being huffed at my brusqueness.

'For the which I thank the Lord,' said I, and hastened on, but ere I reached the school who should I meet but Dick Honeyman—whom you may remember I had thrashed long since. He had left Kirkcubright, and having lived in Edinburgh was now a man of some weight and standing when he paid a visit home, and what is more, he knew it.

'Ah, dominie,' said he, 'how goes it?'

'If 'tis the time,' I answered, 'too quick for me.'

'Ah, dominie, very fair,' said he, 'as I live, very fair, but have you heard the news?'

'Dost mean of Andrew Bethune?' I asked.

'Nay, nay!'

'What then?'

'Of his daughter.'

'The devil take his daughter,' I growled.

'I hope not,' said he, for I have an eye upon her myself. She is the prettiest maid I have ever clapped eyes upon, and, to say truth, here he twirled some half-dozen hairs upon his face, 'I have seen many a one in Edinburgh.'

'It matters not,' said I, 'whether you or the devil take her, for it seems to me I shall have no peace till she is taken away from Kirkcubright, and with that I left him gazing after me in wonder.

Even in school the trouble was not done, for I caught one of the bigger boys carving upon the desk, and on going round behind him to see what it might be, I found the figure of a woman roughly cut upon the wood. I wondered much what this might mean, but judged it to be the figure of a goddess, for we had been reading of them, or mayhap of Helen of Troy, though I fear that had she been as the

carving was, Troy might have been standing yet. Therefore I asked the boy who it might be, whether Venus or Helen, Minerva or Poppea, the wife of Nero, and especially I asked him what the strange thing about her neck was.

'Tis a ruff,' he answered, growing red in the face

'A ruff,' I said, 'but there were no ruffs in those days, stupid lad,' and I pulled his ears for him.

'I know that, sir,' he said.

'Then, who may this be?' I queried, half knowing already what he would answer.

'Tis Mistress Marjorie Bethune,' he faltered.

'*Diable!*' I roared, and as I live that boy had somewhat else to think of the rest of that day, for I showed him another method of carving, and that a rough one also.

But even when my work was over, and I had locked the school door, as I strolled along the village street to old Effie's house, there to get some simples and a decoction of herbs for my father's sickness, I could hear the groups of lads talking of this Mistress Marjorie, till I lost all other feelings in one of wonderment, for I had seen nothing in women save much ado as to how a kirtle would sit, and an ungodly love for sweet stuffs, the which were ever an abomination to me. Therefore, when I had reached home, being perturbed in mind, as my fashion was, I took out the rapier and set to work in the attic room, and by the time the sweat had come out upon me I had forgotten all about this everlasting Mistress Marjorie Bethune, and began to look ever the tasks for the morrow, after having heard that my father was a trifle the better of old Effie's drugs.

I might have spared myself the trouble, howbeit, for when I had gone to bed I dreamed of nothing but an ogre of a woman, who, with a ruff about her neck, and teeth which stuck out from her mouth like a boar's tusks, kept carving at me till she had inscribed upon my skin the name of Mistress Marjorie Bethune, after which she laughed in elfish fashion and vanished, so that I wakened cold with fear and swearing after a manner which would have made my father's hair rise, and in the old days would have brought me such a flogging as I had never had even when he had found the legs of his chair half-sawn through, and his desk filled with wet sea-wrack.

CHAPTER V

OF MAID MARJORIE AND THE CHARGE OF THE WILD CATTLE

AS time wore on, however, the ravings about Mistress Marjorie grew feebler, and those who had raved about *her* now raved about her father, but in another fashion, for, while I heard that she held aloof and rarely showed herself, as, indeed, was no wonder, for I did not like being stared at myself, I say while *she* did not much trouble the Kirktown folk, her father did, for having caught some idle fellows in his grounds he and two of his men set upon them and gave them such a drubbing that they were in bed for a week after it. Moreover, he gave out that there was to be no more pleasuring in 'The Green,' and he bought and kept on his estate a herd of cattle, which were so fierce and wild that they were the terror of all the women and children in the village, and had gored to death a couple of curs which had sought to amuse themselves by snapping at the great beasts' heels.

Therefore, as you may well believe, the Laird of Crookness was little of a favourite either with old or young, only I did not care, for it made no matter of difference to me, nor did old Ebe, who laughed about it and told the Kirktown folk tales of the owners of land in Spain, which made their flesh creep, and, no doubt, gave them many a wakeful night, for fear old Andrew Bethune would play the same tricks on them.

All this time I was not in good humour with myself; my father was not mending, and after a while I found the school life growing distasteful to me, for it was a weary round and there were few of the boys had a love of the classics. I grew more and more to live in the past, thinking

of De Cusac and his sayings, and wondering whether I would ever see some of the strange things of which he had told me, for though old Ebe could tell queerer tales yet he could not tell a story as De Cusac was wont to do, and I lacked the shrugs and the spreading out of the hands and the sneering smile of the Frenchman.

Thus it happened that one half-day at school, the weather being most excellent, I betook myself for a walk, and thinking as usual of De Cusac and his ways, did not even notice till well upon my way that I had taken with me one of my father's hats—a broad-brimmed head-piece which had in itself an air of much gravity and learning.

When I did find out my mistake it troubled me little, for I cared not who should see me, though I must have been a strange-looking figure as I sauntered onwards.

On I went, nor did I take heed whither my feet were carrying me till I found myself, after passing through a gap in a hedge, in a field of short grass that sloped upward to a sharp ridge which shut out the view on that side.

I had never to my knowledge been here before, nor had I any idea where I was, but finding the place quiet and to my taste, I strolled along by the thick and tall hedgerow, till, on rounding a projecting bush, I all but walked into an old man and a girl who were in deep converse. At once it struck me that these must be Andrew Bethune and his daughter, and I was not left long in doubt, for as soon as the old man saw me he raised the cane in his hand and came at me furiously.

'How now,' he cried, 'how now, can you not read, sirrah? What business have you here? Go, call the men, Marjorie, to take this boy up to the house where, I warrant me, he will have something for his pains.' How I winced when he called me boy, for I had grown a moustachios which bade fair to rival De Cusac's. As for the girl, she simply looked at me and did nothing, and I quickly formed a plan for cheating the old man, forgetting, fool that I was, that he had been abroad.

Therefore I merely shrugged my shoulders and stood looking at him.

'You hear me!' he cried.

'*Ma foi*,' I said.

'What say you?' he shouted, shaking his cane at me.

'*Mon Dieu!*' I answered.

He stared at me in wonder and then said something I did not understand.

'Ah, *mon garçon*,' I replied, as De Cusac used to do.

At that he fell into a terrible rage and stamped and shouted for his men till the girl laid her hand on his arm.

'I do not think he is a Frenchman, father,' she said quietly, 'he hath too honest a face.'

Now, when I heard this I forgot all, thinking only that it was a slight upon the memory of De Cusac.

'And may a Frenchman not have an honest face,' I said hotly. 'I have known but one, and he was a good man and true.'

The old man started at hearing me speak, and glared at me from under his bushy eyebrows.

'Was he a friend to you?' asked the girl.

'Yes,' I muttered, 'but he is dead.'

'I am sorry that I spoke,' said she, softly, 'but we have known many and have suffered much from them.'

I had hardly looked at her till then, but when she craved my pardon so prettily I glanced at her and straightway saw why madness had come upon the lads of Kirkcoun.

She was rather under the middle height, but she carried herself in such a fashion and was of a build so graceful that she looked taller. She was simply dressed in cloth of dark blue braided with silver, and a loose hood of the same stuff covered her head, but could not keep in place stray locks of brown hair with which the wind played.

Round her neck she wore a snow-white ruff of some soft stuff, and her little chin, whereon was a tiny dimple, nestled in its folds in a way which made one wish to look at it again. Her face was oval-shaped, pale, no doubt, but with a healthy pallor, and the colour could come to it as I saw ere long. Her eyes were dark and shaded by long lashes, her nose straight and well-shaped, and her mouth was neither too large nor yet too small; but I have done, for I am but a poor hand at a description, suffice to say again that I saw why madness had fallen on the lads of Kirkcoun and wondered not. When I ceased from looking at her, and had seen the

colour mount to her face and her long lashes droop, I said simply, 'I thank you.'

'And I shall thank you, sir,' roared her father, who for a marvel had kept silent as she spoke, 'I shall thank you, sir, to come with us and give an account of yourself to me, for if I will not have men upon my lands neither will I have dwarfs.'

My fingers itched to get at him, but the girl merely said, 'Father!'

He ceased, and had the grace to look the shame he must have felt; but his shouting had done us an evil turn, for a little cry from Mistress Marjorie made us look at the crest of the long low hill, and there on the ridge was the herd of wild cattle of which I have told you, and at their head a great white bull who was pawing the ground and snuffing at the air, and as we looked at him he gave a bellow.

It was answered by the herd, and next moment the brutes were in motion, and began slowly to come down the field.

'Quick, quick!' cried the girl, 'we must make for the gate.'

'Is't far?' I asked, for the hedge was six feet high and thick also.

'Full one hundred yards away.'

'Then, God save us!' I thought, but said nothing, and the three of us started to run as best we might.

Now, seeing us in motion also, the cattle rejoiced exceedingly, at least so it seemed to me, for, lowering their heads, they came on with a rush and a thunder of hoofs.

I soon saw we had no chance with them, and for the second time that day I hit upon a plan, though this time I owed it to old Ebe, for he had told me how the Spaniards on the plains will do if cattle charge them. Therefore I shouted to the old man and girl to run on, and thanked God I had taken my father's hat with me; then I ran out to meet the herd half way up the hill. As I ran I threw a glance backwards and saw there was a chance for Andrew Bethune and his daughter, if I could stop the brutes; therefore, when they were less than a hundred yards away from me, and coming on at full speed I turned my back to them, and taking off my father's hat I bent my body till I was looking at them from between my legs.

I had a fearful moment standing thus, and watching this living mass with hoof and horn come thundering and bellowing down upon me, and then, striving to keep cool, I waved the hat and shrieked and yelled and shouted as a madman might do.

On they came, and were within thirty yards of me when the great white leader stuck out his forelegs and came to a dead halt, quivering and snorting with terror, and, no doubt, wondering what this strange thing might be. His followers did likewise, and then, to my joy, with one accord they turned tail and fled up the hill again, while I howled and whooped at them, and turning, ran the other way towards the hedge, for I feared I had no time to reach the gate, behind which I could see the old man and the girl. It was not long before I knew they were after me again, and that it was a race for life, but I was ever a fast runner, and it was downhill work.

My only chance I saw was to leap the hedge, and I doubted if the power was in me, but I could see a little knoll in front of me, whence to take the spring, and with straining breath and a cold feeling in my back I rushed onwards.

They were close behind me when I reached the mound, and pausing not a moment, I gathered my legs under me and leaped into the air.

Good luck! the cattle seemed to plunge into the hedge just as I did; but with this difference, that, whereas they went into it head first, I came down upon it from above, for it was too wide for me to clear.

There were prickles in the hedge and they were long, but I heeded them not for I was safe, and clambering with difficulty across the bush-tops, I scrambled somehow, scratched and bleeding, to the ground, my hat gone and my hair dishevelled. I stood panting and bewildered till the old man came rushing up to me, and taking both my hands in his shook them not once but many times.

Mistress Marjorie, who had followed him, stood looking at me with her lips parted, and a strange look in her dark eyes, and, in very truth, there was enough of colour in her face now. When the old laird had done with my hands he seized me by the arm.

'You pardon me?' he said.

'There is naught to pardon,' said I a trifle coldly, 'the grounds are yours and I had no right within them, yet I trespassed unwittingly, being deep in thought.'

'Say no more, say no more,' he shouted, being much shaken as I could see, 'Andrew Bethune may be dour, but he doth not forget a service, and of all services this is the greatest; and now come, sir, I pray you, you will do us the honour to dine with us though it be late.'

'I am much beholden to you,' I answered, 'but suffer me first to get my father's hat which I have lost; he hath a love for it.'

'But it is in the field,' said the girl.

'No doubt,' I answered, 'but the cattle have gone over the ridge again, being stuck full of prickles, I trow.'

At this they laughed, and climbing the gate, I found the hat without misadventure.

'And now, sir,' said the laird, 'may I ask to whom we owe our lives?'

'My name is Jeremy Clephane,' said I.

'Clephane?' said he. 'Clephane, you are no relative to Sir Roger Clephane of Connel?'

'He is my uncle, though I have never seen him.'

'Is it so? is it so?' he muttered. 'You are not—' and then he stopped.

'I am not like him, you would say,' I answered, for my uncle was a man full six feet tall. 'No, verily, I am not.'

Perchance it was the bitterness with which I spoke that made the girl say,—

'You may be none the worse of that, sir.'

'Ay, ay,' said the laird, 'there is an old proverb, "good gear is aye put up in sma' bundles," and I trow we have seen the truth o't this day.'

I bowed as De Cusac had been wont to do, but it made Mistress Marjorie smile as I could see, and I felt hot inwardly.

'But, bless me, if you are nephew to Sir Roger, you must even be grandson to Sir Dick, mad Dick Clephane, my old leader, and, as I live, you are like him in face though not in figure. Your hand, Sir Jeremy, your hand,' he cried.

'I am Master Clephane only,' said I.

'The devil take it,' he shouted, 'you are Sir Jeremy to me; but what are you doing here in Kirktown?'

'I am in my father's place.'

'What, old Hal, the reformer as we ever called him?'

'Even so.'

'And what is that?'

'I am the dominie at Kirktown.'

At this he roared and laughed till his face grew purple.

'God bless me!' he chuckled, 'to think upon it, that I should threaten to cane a Clephane and a dominie in one day. Hark to it, Marjorie, hark to it, my lassie,' and he did naught but laugh and chuckle till we reached the house, which was a great one built of stone and well shaded by many trees.

Now it would weary you were I to tell you how I dined, of the strange wines I saw, for the laird loved to live well; of the tales he told me, for he had been with my grandfather in the fatal plot which drove him and his following out of Scotland; of stories of his life abroad and his service in France, for he had fought with the Huguenots, but, as far as I could gather, had not been over well treated by them.

Suffice to say that I sat and stared much at him and yet more at his daughter, who each time met me with a smile, but did not colour again, whereat I was for some reason not best pleased, and almost before I knew what I was doing I had promised to teach her the classics in my spare hours, and in return had accepted a flagon of rare old wine for my poor father with a promise of more to follow, then, with my head in a whirl, I bade them farewell and took my way homewards, but though it seemed as nothing I was a mighty long time in reaching Kirktown, as I can well remember.

And now I had an interest in life again, for as the days wore on I knew that the madness had fallen on me also. In vain I strove not to think of her; she would come to me in my dreams, and now not as an ogre with tusks like a boar's, nor was I glad when she vanished as I had been before.

Fool that I was, I would reason with myself and would say, 'Look you, Jeremy, she can never be yours. What! dost think she would ever deign to look upon a village

dominie as broad as he is long, put her out of mind, *mon garçon*,'—for, thanks to her, I had learned what *mon garçon* meant.

But what use was there in saying all this and then sitting by her for an hour poring over *Virgil* or the pages of *Homer*, watching the sunlight strike upon her hair and listening to her silvery laugh as she strove to master a construction, wrinkling her pretty brows in the doing of it.

'*Mon Dieu!*' as De Cusac would have said, 'was ever man in such a plight?'

And she was kind to me, more gracious than any had ever been, and somehow or other I came to tell her all I had ever done and my hopes, which were but few, save only as regarding the Frenchman and one other, and I listened to her as she would sing a war song of the Huguenots or a love lilt of Italy, making nothing of its meaning and caring less, but going homewards with the air ringing in my ears and a dull weight upon my heart. Though I knew it not, however, and little dreamed of it, there were signs of what was coming, that which raised my hopes and set my heart beating as it had never done, even when I had witnessed the fight upon the shore and from between my legs had seen the charge of the wild cattle; and yet, so strange are the ways of Providence, that which also sent me forth a wanderer amongst strange people in strange lands.

Now, this was neither more nor less than the belief that Marjorie Bethune was not altogether indifferent to me, but that I may tell you how this came about I must go back a little.

If my memory serves me aright, I think I have told you that Dick Honeyman, whom I had once thrashed at school, had come home to Kirktown on a visit and had been smitten with the madness, but I do not think that I set down the fact of his having put on wondrous fine feathers as well as great airs, to wit, a cloak of black velvet, padded and lined with red, a doublet of grey cloth slasked and trussed with silk, and a peaked cap with a feather in it, which might have been culled from as fine a bird as himself. Moreover, to the great wonder and awe of the Kirktown folk, and to the pride of himself and his three sisters, he was girt about with a baldric of soft leather from which dangled a rapier in its sheath, and being, so I must

confess, well-built and not ill-favoured, and what is more, the only son of a worthy burgher who had made much money by trading in 'the kingdom,' he was looked upon by all as a likely suitor for the old laird's daughter, but I wondered if he knew the wrist stroke of De Cusac. On the head of this belief he had one day seen fit to set foot in Crookness, but had come home in sorry plight, having been chased by the cattle, he said, but I knew better.

I was also told that he had sworn he would be even with the laird yet and lower the pride of the hussy, for so he called Mistress Marjorie, and this because she would have naught to do with him and laughed at his strut and fine airs. He did not love me, as I could see, more especially when I went to teach at Crookness, but I kept out of his way and avoided meeting him.

It was early summer and the hawthorn bushes were decked with red and white blossoms, yet there was no sign of his going, so that I feared he stayed for some evil purpose, and kept my weather eye on him. Nor had I judged him amiss, for one day, passing through the woods to see a boy who lay sick at a hamlet some three miles from Kirkcoun, I was startled by what seemed like a cry for help. The boy's brother was with me, and doubting my ears, I asked him if he had heard aught.

'Yes, Master Clephane,' he said, 'and there 'tis again.'

There was no doubt of it now, and what was more, I knew the voice to be that of Marjorie Bethune.

'Keep quiet, boy,' I whispered, 'and follow me.'

We ran as fast as might be, though hindered by the undergrowth, in the direction whence came the cry, and bursting through some bushes came in sight of the girl struggling in the grasp of Dick Honeyman, who had a hand upon her mouth, and had half-choked her.

I said nothing when I saw this, but set my teeth, and coming quickly upon him from behind, to the great joy of the boy who was with me, I took the villain by the back of his fine doublet and the puffs of his trunk hose, and putting forth all my strength, I cast him head-first into a thorn bush which, as luck would have it, grew close by, and then turned to raise Marjorie Bethune, for in her fear she had fallen to the ground.

CHAPTER VI

OF THE FIGHT IN THE WOOD AND WHAT I SAW IN THE WELL

BY the time I had helped her to rise, and set her leaning against a tree stem, Master Honeyman had, with much pain and labour and still greater rending of his clothes, pulled himself from out the prickly bush, and his rage was something great to witness.

He would, I verily believe, have run me through at once, but his hands were set with prickles like a hedgehog's back. and he could not draw his sword for the pain they gave him.

'Sdeath!' said he, 'you deformed devil, you shall answer for this.'

'When you please,' said I.

'Wait till I withdraw these prickles from my hands, and I shall teach you to meddle with me.'

'Very good,' I answered, 'but in the meantime I shall send for my sword, 'tis well to settle these matters in a fitting manner.'

He looked surprised, but merely scowled at me, for, to do him justice, he was no coward.

I gave the boy directions as to where he might find the rapier, and charged him to tell no one but to return straightway, and he sped off like an arrow. Mistress Bethune had by this time come to herself but said little, only thanking me quietly with a wonderful look in her dark eyes, and asking me to conduct her home to Crookness. Thereupon I was in a quandary, for I did not wish her to know we were to fight, and, as my manner is in such a case, I said nothing.

'Dost hear me, Master Clephane?' said she. 'Let us be going.'

'But,' I stammered.

'You have no wish to accompany me,' she said coldly.

'Very good, Master Clephane, I will remember it.'

'Nay,' I answered, 'I would go with you willingly, but that this fellow and I have some small matters to settle.'

At this the fear came into her eyes.

'You are not going to fight this man?' she asked.

'Even so,' said I, 'as soon as Master Honeyman has got rid of his prickles; he likes them as little as the cattle did, Mistress Bethune.'

'But this must not be,' said she, 'you shall not fight on my account, Master Clephane. Surely you have hurt him enough,' she added, glancing at the forlorn wight.

'No doubt, but you see he has not hurt me sufficiently, and would fain do so.'

'I care not, you shall not fight more for me, dost hear, Jeremy.'

Now when I heard her call me Jeremy, I could willingly have seen her safe to Crookness, but I only answered,—

'Very good.'

On hearing this Dick Honeyman flew into a passion.

'You shall fight me here, and now, you dog!' he shouted.

'By —, I shall kill you where you stand!'

'Very good,' I answered again.

'But, Jeremy, you promised me not to fight,' urged the girl, and I saw that she was trembling, and pitied her, but I was not minded to let the villain go free, and, in any case, matters had gone so far that I could not draw back, even had I wished.

'Without doubt,' I replied, 'but, Mistress Marjorie, that was on your account, it happens, howbeit, I have some small matters of mine own to settle with this fellow, and here comes Peter with my sword!'

'Can you use a sword, Master Clephane?' said the girl, in surprise, and yet methought there was a ring of hopefulness in her voice.

Now, being ruffled at her not calling me Jeremy again, I said shortly,—

'You will see, mistress, an' you wait.'

She did not answer me again, but grew pale to the lips and stood watching us, for by this time Honeyman had got rid of his prickles and had drawn his sword.

'You fool!' he said, 'you fool! Dost know I will show you no mercy, and I learned the art with De Berault of the Horse Wynd.'

'Good lack!' said I, 'what a man it is, but have you ever heard tell of De Cusac?'

'No,' said he, wonderingly.

'Then will I show you his wrist stroke,' said I. 'On guard, sir, on guard.'

I soon found that, whether or not he had learnt his sword-play from De Berault, I knew a trick or two of which he was ignorant, but, at the same time, he had a feint which was new to me, and so, wishing to learn the same, I was in no hurry and let him press me at the first. He had the advantage of me in height, but in reach and quickness I was his superior, and he wearied himself and grew red in the face as he lunged and thrust at me again and again without effect, save once when he drew blood from my cheek, and yet I would not have missed that wound for a silver penny, as I heard Mistress Marjorie cry out when the blood trickled down my face, and something told me it was not for fear of herself if I should have the worst of it.

At last, when Master Honeyman had grown breathless and was sweating copiously, I deemed it time to bring the matter to an end, and albeit I had no wish to kill the fellow, or, for that, even to wound him, yet to punish him I played with him awhile, till I could see he felt that to be in the prickly bush was as a heaven compared with his present state, and then, by the old wrist stroke, I sent the rapier spinning from him and he was at my mercy. He folded his arms and waited for me, but I bade him sternly to be-gone and show his face no more in Kirkcoun, and he went away sullenly without a word, for he knew he had been beaten fairly and by the man he hated.

After this Mistress Marjorie was more gracious to me than ever, and, I fear, we did the old Romans scant justice, for she would tell me much of France and the countries she had seen, and laugh merrily over my tales of school, and the strange ways of boys, for she soon got over her

fright, and Honeyman had left Kirkcoun the very day of the fight.

Had it not been for two things I had been as happy as the summer day was long, but my father had grown worse, till now his great brain might have been pap for all the use it was, and he could no longer teach at school, having taken tremors in his legs, and being full of grand ideas; to wit, that he owned untold gold, had fifty children, and was to be made king within a year. It was sad to see this fine man a wreck, and ere long it told upon the school, for boys who had come for the teaching of Hal Clephane did not overmuch relish that of Jeremy, the Squat, and it seemed to me I would have to look out for some other trade if I were to live, for untold gold in the brain does not always mean gold in the pocket. Now, all this weighed heavy upon me, for what had I to offer Andrew Bethune's daughter save myself and my sword, the which I feared would not go for much in Kirkcoun, and on this account I took care to hide my thoughts and to put a guard upon my tongue; but Nature is too much for any man, as I am about to show.

It came about that one warm day, when we had tired of the doings of Hector and the groans of Priam, Mistress Marjorie asked me where a certain wishing-well she had heard tell of was situated.

I knew little concerning it, save the part of the wood in which it lay, and that lads and lasses went there to mutter rhymes and see their fortunes in the water, and came back looking queer or foolish, as the case might be, and so I told her.

'It is time you knew it then, Master Jeremy,' said she, being in a merry mood. 'Come and we shall see what fortune it will bring us.'

'I warrant there is little good fortune in it for me,' I said sadly enough, for two more boys had left the school that day.

'Out upon you for a gloomy prophet,' she said, 'you shall come as I tell you.'

It was not far to the well and we said little on our way thither, for I fell to watching her face when she was not looking at me, and had little time for talk, till she stopped

when the well came in sight, a little pond lying still and peaceful in a leafy glade.

'I wonder,' she said, 'if it tells good or bad fortunes?'

'If you call being wed good fortune,' I answered, 'then it predicts the former, for I have known a half-dozen couples come here who are now man and wife, though for that matter gossip has it that most of them have but a sorry time.'

'Why, 'tis full of interest,' she answered, smiling at me. 'Perchance it will show you Mistress Clephane. Go and look and tell me, Master Jeremy, and then my turn shall come.'

At that the madness came upon me stronger than ever, and before I knew it I had spoken my heart to her.

'God knows!' I said, 'Mistress Marjorie I shall marry but one or none at all.'

I saw her tremble as I spoke, and she grew pale as she had done when I fought with Dick Honeyman. Nevertheless she smiled and said lightly, 'Then we can see if the well tells the truth, can we not, Master Jeremy?'

'I care not,' I answered passionately, 'for what the well says but for what you say, Mistress Marjorie. Since ever I have seen you, I have thought of little and cared for nothing beyond you. The school may fail but I can work and I can wait, only do not say me nay,' I pleaded, 'for, you know, though I may be little to look upon, I would die to serve you, and Marjorie—' I stammered.

I stopped, for she gave a little laugh, and then, taking me lightly by the arm, led me to the edge of the well, which was little more than a clear pool of water fed by a spring. She said not a word but pointed downwards. I looked into the water as into a mirror, and then I saw what she meant.

I could see myself squat and broad with a bewildered look upon my countenance, and by my side she was standing, taller only by a little, but graceful as one of the young palm trees I have seen, a smile upon her fair face—a mocking smile which told me all. A moment I looked at the contrast, and then with a smothered cry, like a stricken deer, I broke from her side and stumbled somehow into the wood again and so out of her sight, and, as I live, her

laugh, clear and silvery, reached me and served but to add to my misery and despair.

Fool that I had been, blind fool, to think that her smiles and gracious ways had meant aught, when, to make the time pass less wearily, she had been playing with me, letting me deceive myself and leading me to believe that she cared for me, at least, a little.

How I reached home I know not, for I can call to mind nothing till I found myself in my room and flung myself upon my knees by the bedside. I lay there crushed and desolate for a time with the light gone from my life, though without all seemed fair and sweet, the air bore the scent of flowers and honey and the lap of the waves on the shingle came to my ears through the open window, but at last a great bitterness stole over me and I grew calm and cool. Rising to my feet, I found my sword and buckled it on, and there was I knew an ugly sneer upon my face.

Was I to go about in Kirkcaldy like a beaten cur because of any woman?

'*Ma foi*,' I thought 'not if I knew it,' and I made my plans.

There would be no school the next day in Kirkcaldy, nor would the wee dominie teach there again I vowed to myself. My heart was grieved for my father, albeit he had shown me little love, but I knew his sister, who, I verily believe, hated every mortal save herself and her brother, would care for him and he would not miss me, therefore I waited till the dusk, and then, putting some food in a wallet, I stuck the dag in my belt and taking what money I had, and I can call to mind that there was but one silver piece, I fastened on my good cloak of thick, grey cloth stuff and slipped out quietly into the night, saying farewell to no one but sad at heart, and setting my face to the west, I strode away to find what Fate might have in store for me. I was bound for the Queen's ferry away up the Firth at the narrows, for I was resolved none should know where I had gone. It was a long march in the still summer night, but it was easy to keep the road which followed the shore line, and as the morning began to break and streaks of faint light showed away to the eastward, I was upon the hill down which the path ran to the little village at the ferry.

No one was stirring as yet and I made a breakfast of the food in my wallet, and then, going down to the shore and finding a pleasant nook among the rocks, I wrapped my cloak about me, and forgot my loneliness and the pain at my heart as drowsiness stole over me and I slept.

I woke with a start, for a man was shaking me rudely by the shoulder.

'Art for the ferry, lad?' said he.

'Yes,' I answered, blinking and rubbing the grit from my eyes.

'Then hurry, lad, hurry, for the boat leaves.'

I sprang to my feet, and running to the wharf, I paid my fare and stepped on board the smack, the boatmen eyeing me curiously I thought. Next moment they cast her loose, and setting sail we stood out into the channel, the current sweeping us to the eastward of the rock of Inchgarvie, for it runs here very strong and deep. There were but two other passengers, horsemen, early upon the road, and they were laughing and talking merrily, and such was my mood that their converse jarred upon me.

'Confound this ferry!' said the one, 'but for it we need not have stopped in that flea-bitten inn over night.'

'No doubt,' said the other, 'but what would you have? Were it not for these narrows the sail would be long and wearisome, unless you were minded to cross the river at Stirling and add twenty and odd miles to your ride? What else would you have?'

'God knows!' said the first speaker, 'could they not hang a rope from the rock there to either shore and swing us in a basket?'

'You are a mad fellow. Why not a bridge when you are at it?'

'Methinks it is you who are mad, a double rope on turning wheels one might have, but a bridge *never* till men have wings and fly as birds. The boatmen grinned and the two wrangled about the rope till we reached the other side. As for me I wondered at their folly, for I knew that even the old Romans could not have worked a rope in such a place, while as for a bridge '*Ma foi*,' as De Cusac would have said.

I stepped ashore and found myself for the first time on

soil other than that of Fife, but my spirits had come back to me in some measure, for the morning air was fresh and a fine sea breeze was blowing on shore. Therefore it was with a lighter heart that I turned eastwards and took my way towards the capital, which I learned was but nine miles distant from the South ferry. I had tramped, mayhap, five miles of the road, passing through one village but seeing few folk, when I was overtaken by an old man who was seated in a cart drawn by a horse, whose ribs and hip-bones were not his least prominent parts, while his joints were so stiff that one half-looked for them to squeak and groan as did the cart-wheels.

‘Good-morrow,’ said the driver, sucking in his cheeks as he chirruped to the horse, ‘wilt have a lift townwards?’

Though I grieved for his beast yet I clambered into the cart which had many baskets and packages stowed away in it and smelt most foully of onions, for I was a trifle tired and the sun was growing hot. I found the carrier—for such was his trade—a pleasing fellow, albeit somewhat of a gossip, for he would have had all my story if he could, but he told me of a tavern where I might lodge in comfort and yet not pay overmuch.

He bade me beware of the streets at night for there were cut-purses and rogues in plenty, and he told me tales of fights and bickerings he had seen between the town watch and these same rufflers, till I wondered if any might live in safety in such a place. I was mightily astonished when we had passed through the city gate, for the streets were steep and narrow and paved with rounded stones in a most elegant fashion, and I stared hard at the throngs of people, the booths and shops, and the high-gabled houses with their shining windows; but most of all I marvelled at the great rock with the castle set on it and the dark loch at its base, and thought on the tales my father had told me of it.

We halted at the tavern of which the carrier had spoken and he would take no money, but I found a glass of ale to his liking and paid for it gladly, and was sorry to see him go rumbling away, for I knew not a soul in this great place save, perchance, Dick Honeyman, and I had no great wish to fall in with him.

Having secured a lodging for the night and eaten a frugal

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meal of buttermilk and oaten cakes, I strolled out into the streets, and if I had had any fear that folks would take notice of me I might have spared myself the trouble, for all seemed busy on their own account and paid no heed to Jeremy Clephane.

CHAPTER VII

OF THE SELLER OF UNICORN'S HORN AND THE BRAWL IN THE TAVERN

THE tavern was in an open space called the Grass-market, round which stood great houses, and at its upper end was a drinking well of stone, square, and with broad steps about its base, and round it was gathered a motley crowd of men, women and children. I came up, and, mingling with the crowd, found a man standing on the topmost step haranguing the folk at the pitch of his cracked voice. He was a merry-looking rogue—big, fat, and with a bloated face, dressed in parti-coloured clothes of faded red and yellow and having on his head a tall hat, cone-like in shape, adorned with a dirty riband, which was buckled round it above its broad brim.

‘What have we here? what have we here?’ he shouted, as I pushed my way into the throng, ‘what have we here, worshipful citizens? By the beard of Aaron! that which to live without is not to live. Look to it, good people, look to it!’ and with that he poured a yellow fluid from one horn cup to another. ‘It is,’ he said, sinking his voice, ‘the great elixir from the horn of the unicorn, the alchercheden of Arabia. Who will buy? who will buy? for it expelleth all pestilent fevers, and is much commended against the bitings of mad dogs, as also against worms. It is sudorific, alexipharmic and cardiac, and cureth many great sicknesses, as also the epilepsy; there is in it amber, ivory, leaf-gold and coral. Who will buy? who will buy?’

He stopped to sell some of this precious liquid to several folk who reached out to him, and then took something else

from the great basket at his side and cuffed the ears of the boy who helped him.

'What have we here? what have we here?' he began again, shaking a vial filled with a white substance. Then once more, as if telling some great secret, he lowered his voice, 'It is the milk of the wild ass, which whiteneth the skin of women, it taketh away the itch and removeth all wrinkles and scabbed nails. Taken at the rising of the dog-star, it cureth all leprosies, scales and scurvies. Who will buy? who will buy?'

Forthwith there was such a rush and jostling that I found myself right in front of this vendor of drugs, and straightway his eye caught mine.

'What have we here? what have we here?' he bawled, pointing at me. 'A dwarf, a stunted one, yet will I make him grow. Step up, good sir, I prithee, step up.'

Wondering what he would do with me, but much doubting his power, albeit he seemed somewhat of a magician and had spoken truth as to the wild asses' milk—for did not Poppea, wife of Nero—keep many asses?—I got up beside him, and the crowd pressed nearer to see what miracle would come to pass.

Now I waited for him to give me some potion or other, but, instead, he took me by the nape of the neck and bawled out again, 'Who will buy? who will buy?' While the crowd, perceiving his sorry wit, shook with laughter.

'What folly is this?' said I, shaking off his hand.

He drew back a little, but putting on an air of unconcern, which I saw was far from him, he shouted out,—

'I said that I would cause you to grow.'

'No doubt,' said I.

'Could you see over the heads of all these good folk ere you mounted here?'

'Verily, no,' said I.

'Then have you not grown, fool?' he asked, and the crowd shook again. But they shook still more when I said,—

'Truly, I have grown, but in wisdom only,' and taking him by the arm I shouted out in my turn,—

'What have we here? what have we here? A fool! a fool who stands on two legs. Verily I will make him stand upon

his head,' and forthwith I seized him, and, despite his kicks and struggles, stood him on his pate amongst his salves and vials till the bottles for the most part were as empty as his skull. Then while the crowd, being mightily tickled at the sight, were well-nigh choked with mirth, for, as he rose, his hair was a mass of elixir of unicorn's horn and asses' milk, and, God knows! what other filth. I slipped away, and pushing through the throng without let or hindrance, left them to see the end of the jest.

Now I think I will not set down all I saw and did in the capital, for in these days of better roads for traffic and the transport of heavy guns, travelling is easy and many have seen the wonders of the city, which even in the days of which I write had well-nigh fifty thousand souls within its walls.

Suffice to say that I saw the house of John Knox, the which I learn is still standing, the palace where Rizzio died under the knives of the assassins, nineteen years before, and where the king held court, although I did not see him. Nor need I say aught of the Regent Moray's house and the nobles' houses on the southern slope of the ridge, whereon stands the great cathedral, but there was more interest for me in the grim prison of the Tolbooth, in which I came very near being lodged. But of the events which led to this I must write more fully as they have a bearing on my tale, and especially because they were what, for a brief time, gave me more power than any man in Scotland, ay, or even in England, albeit it was not of much service to me, as I shall show.

I had not been over a week in Edinburgh when I found my money vanishing at such a rate that it was clear to me if I was to live that I must do something whereby I might earn enough to keep me in food and pay my lodging. I soon found that this was like to be somewhat of a problem, as I knew no trade and had no one to help me. At first I thought of taking a French name and giving lessons in swordsmanship, but I remembered my last attempt to play the Frenchman, and though I could speak French a little I gave up the plan. And so in the end I fell back on teaching, though it seemed but a sorry chance. I left the tavern and hired a small room under the eaves of a house

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in the Luckenbooths, and there I hung out a sign which I had painted on a board and carved with much care and trouble to the effect that

Here Master Clephane doth teach
the Classics,
Both Greek and Latin,
Verse and Prose.

Then I sat down and waited and watched my store of pence getting daily smaller and smaller. It was on the third day after I had hung up the sign, and I well remember that I felt forlorn and mightily hungered, for I was too proud to beg and had eaten nothing for two days save a mess of porridge which the old woman who owned the room had given me out of pity. I say it was on the third day that, as I sat at my little table with some books and parchments I had bought spread out before me and wondering what I should do next, I heard steps upon the stairs, and presently there entered a little old man with a mean, ferret-like face holding a boy by the hand.

I rose and bowed to him after the fashion of De Cusac, though my heart beat with the hope that this might prove the ending of my troubles, and I thought of something good to dine upon.

He seemed pleased with my manners, for he nodded and muttered to himself,—

‘Humph, of good breeding! Humph, hath been in France, I warrant, but poor from the look of things—cursedly poor, I make no doubt.’

I stared at him in wonder and asked him his pleasure.

‘Of a strange build,’ he went on muttering, ‘humph, yet what of the body, what of the body, the mind is all we need have care about.’

Again I asked him what his pleasure was, and this time the boy answered me in a shrill voice,—

‘You must speak louder, sir; my uncle is troubled with his ears, and he does not know you hear him.’ At this the old man ceased muttering and tweaked the boy’s ear till it grew red.

‘Yes,’ said he, ‘I am deaf—cursedly deaf; but what has

brought me up this long stair—and cursedly long it is—is this sign of yours. My boy here—he is my nephew as you may have gathered—wishes to acquire knowledge, and the first step to it, as I have ever said, is that of Latin.’

‘You speak truth, sir,’ said I.

‘Of course, sir, of course,’ he said testily; ‘dost think Giles Goback would lie to please any man?’

Now, not knowing the ways of Giles Goback, I kept peace, but waited eagerly for what he might say next.

‘Well,’ he continued, ‘what are the terms upon which you teach the same, sir? Am I to stand here all day in this cock loft?’

Being much afraid lest he should draw back I mentioned but a small sum.

‘Tut, tut,’ he said ‘twill half ruin me; but still no man ever said Giles Goback would not spend if ’twere for learning. What was your school, sir?’

‘Kirktown,’ said I.

‘What?’

‘Kirktown in Fife,’ I shouted.

‘Ah, Saint Andrews?’ he said with a smirk. ‘Good, good; and where abroad, sir, where abroad?’

‘I fear, sir,’ I shouted, ‘that ’tis you who are abroad.’

‘What mean you, sir? If deaf, I am not blind, I would have you know.’

I feared to anger him and I bowed again.

‘You mistook my meaning, sir; I am not of Saint Andrews, nor have I been abroad.’

‘Then where the devil have you been?’ he shouted.

‘At Kirktown,’ said I.

‘And where may that be?’

‘In Fife,’ I answered.

‘And only there?’

‘Yes,’ I stammered, wondering if he meant Kirktown or myself.

‘Tut, tut,’ said he, ‘what is this, sir? Have I climbed this long stair for naught? I will have law of you for this as sure as I am called Giles Goback,’ and straightway he hurried the boy out of the room and so down the stairs while I sank back into my chair and fell to thinking for how much my doublet would sell.

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And yet, when I thought upon it, I felt that it would not be wise to sell my doublet, for if this Giles Goback had any power to harm me, I opined that the law would doubtless fall more heavily on a man without a doublet than on a man who had one, and my cloak I had given to a poor famished wretch who had begged from me a week before. I fell to wondering, therefore, what else I might sell. My sword I would not part with—of that I was resolved; I could not go barefooted or bareheaded, and there remained nothing but the dag. It was a clumsy weapon when one considers the fine horse pistols nowadays, and yet, at that time, it was of some value, and I knew that I could sell it for a sum that would keep me for a few days. But when I came to think upon it I called to mind it was the only thing of my father's which I had, and my mind revolted from the notion of turning it into money. Instead of that, therefore, I searched my wallet, my pockets, and found I had enough to pay for a glass of ale and nothing more, and yet there was a gnawing at my inwards which I had never felt before, and I dared not beg from the old dame lest she should turn me out.

As I sat and stared at the solitary coin upon the table, the thought came into my mind that, perchance, if I reached the sea I might get some work to do, for I could manage a boat and lift a load with any man, and yet I knew deep down in my mind that this was not my only reason, for I longed to gaze across the Firth to where Kirkcoun lay, and where—but at the thought of the woman who had played me false I ground my heel upon the floor and set my teeth.

It did not take me long to buckle on my sword and sally forth—as needy an adventurer as could be found in all the city; and I call to mind that my belt was drawn mightily tight around my middle, for I recalled a tale of old Ebe's as to how he had clung to an upturned boat for some days and had found a tightened belt a great joy and comfort to his stomach.

I inquired the way to Leith, and found it a good and pleasant road, flanked by high hedgerows, which, I doubted not, might hide a fine parcel of rogues on a dark night, but no one meddled with me for it was not yet mid-day, and I reached the seaport in an hour's time. It was a clean little

place, but bustling withal, being famed for its mills and having one long wharf and a good jetty built of squared stone, where lay some half-dozen crafts loading and unloading, while out at sea were three or four more riding at their anchorage. I felt tired and thirsty after my walk, for the day was sultry, and, feeling a trifle reckless, resolved to spend my last coin on a glass of ale, and therefore cast about for a tavern where I might rest awhile.

There were not a few I found, but my heart warmed to one which bore on its signboard the figure of a great yellow ship, and was called the 'Wood Arms,' after the good old Laird of Largo as I could see, for the ship was no other than the yellow frigate, and every Fifeman knows what she has done in olden times. I entered at the low door, and taking my seat at a table in a dark corner where I could see out of the open window, I called for my ale with the air of one who drank twenty glasses in a day. When it was set before me by a serving-maid, I sat still and made no hurry to drink it, but took stock of the inn wherein I found myself.

If old Sir Andrew had seen it, I warrant he would have piped all hands to clean the decks and put things trim, besides soundly rating the landlord, who was a dirty-looking fellow with a scowling face and a three days' beard upon his chin.

I called him to me for the room was empty, and asked him if there were many lodging in the inn, for I judged that if he thought I would stay he might let me sit longer in my corner, and I felt tired and sleepy.

Nay, sir,' he said, 'we have none here but a swashbuckling Frenchman who has in very truth driven all others away, but,' he added, seeing he had let the cat out of the bag, 'I should not think you would fear him, sir.'

'Not I. But what hath he done?' I queried.

'He would pick a quarrel with his father's ghost,' he said, 'and is ever boasting of his skill with the sword; indeed, he has wounded two men and has ruined our custom.'

'Then why do you not take him crop and heels and turn him out?' said I.

'I have thought of it,' he answered, stroking his chin, 'and it may be needful—but, good luck! here he comes,' and with a scared expression, which was a better answer

to my question than all his words, he hurried away, and I heard steps coming down a flight of stairs which creaked as though in pain at every tread.

A moment later a door at the far end of the room was thrown open and a man entered. He was a big, powerful fellow, dressed in the extreme of fashion, and with a basket-hilted rapier trailing behind him. He wore riding boots with great spurs, and clattered up to the long table in the centre of the room, making as much noise as a troop of horse.

'Ho, *aubergiste* !' he called out. 'Come here, fool !' and he twisted his long moustachios, which, with a tuft of black hair upon his chin, was all his face ornament, for he was as ugly as sin, his cheeks bagging below his heavy jaws as do a mastiff's, and he had the marks of half-a-dozen scars upon his visage.

The landlord approached him, smiling as sweetly as his nature would allow him.

'Did I not order a flagon of wine and somewhat to eat at this hour?' said the bully, leaning forward and fixing his eyes on the unhappy host of the 'Wood Arms.'

'Nay, sir,' stammered the latter, 'you are mistaken.'

'Ho, ho ! mistaken am I ?—Geoffrey de Papillon, mistaken ? I think not, *maitre aubergiste* ; I rather think not,' and with that the Frenchman spun the poor landlord round, and with a kick sent him flying for his viands, at the same time overturning a stool which rolled towards the outer door.

It was no business of mine, but I felt my gorge rise at this ugly braggart who lorded it in this fashion in an inn of Scotland, but I never moved, and he did not notice me, for, as I have said, I was in a dark corner, and he settled down to his wine and platter of meat and pastry. As I was sitting gazing at this brawler and wondering where I had seen someone like him, a shadow from the window made me look out and I saw a young man with an old dame pass by. I watched them stop at the door by which I had entered and talk together, and I marked the beautiful face of the dame, fringed by silvery hair, which I could see despite the hood drawn over her head. The young man nodded, and next moment entered by himself, and I re-

garded with pleasure his fine, straight figure and the gallant way he bore himself, and then he blundered over the fallen stool and fell against the table with such violence as to spill the wine over the Frenchman's knees.

'I crave your pardon,' said the young man, with a pleasant smile, getting on his feet once more, 'it was the fault of this stool,' and he picked it up. 'Landlord, a fresh flagon of wine for this gentleman.'

'The fault of the stool, was it?' sneered the Frenchman, with an oath. 'The fault of your cursedly, clumsy leg, you blunderer!' *Diable!* am I to have my clothes ruined by a Scottish suckling with no hair upon his face?'

The boy flushed hotly.

'There is no need of such offensiveness,' said he, 'I have craved your pardon and renewed your wine, but I will pay for your breeches if you will have it so.'

At this the Frenchman pushed back his chair and rose slowly to his full height, his face full of menace.

'This to me, dog!' he roared. 'This to Guy de Papillon, who could buy you up twice over! *Diable!* there can be but one ending to this!' and he gave the lad a sharp slap upon the face.

The boy stared at him in a bewildered way.

'Well?' said the bully. 'But I see you are a coward—a chicken-heart. Ah! ah! I must kick you as I did our brave friend, the *aubergiste*.'

'I am no coward,' said the lad, slowly drawing his sword from its sheath of velvet, 'but I have a mother, and—'

'A mother!' mocked the Frenchman, 'well, I suppose most men have a mother, though I have known some who had no father. Perchance,' he sneered 'you are one of those.'

'My God!' said the boy, flaring into a passion, 'you shall answer for this, you foul-mouthed brute!'

Now I had sat quietly and watched all this with interest, but when I saw that the bully would murder the poor boy, I rose and, leaving my corner, advanced to meet them.

The Frenchman turned and stared at me.

'What have we here?' he said. 'A crab, as I live!'

'If I am a crab,' I answered him quietly, 'I am one who can bite. But, sir,' I continued, turning to the young man,

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'you must not fight with this fellow, he is a noted swordsman and will kill you.'

'I care not,' said the boy, hotly, 'he has insulted both myself and my widowed mother. I shall fight him if I die for it.'

'Nay, nay!' I objected, 'remember your mother, lad; I will fight for you, if you will.'

He paused irresolute, but the mocking laugh of the bully decided him.

'I thank you, sir,' he said coldly, 'but I can take care of myself.' Seeing it was useless to say more, I stepped aside and watched to see that there should be fair play, for I doubted this Frenchman. Their swords crossed and the poor boy did his best, I make no doubt, but after a couple of passes, and ere I could prevent him, as I had intended, the brute of a bully got under the lad's guard and ran him through the chest with so fierce a thrust that he had to jerk hard to withdraw his sword.

The weapon dropped from the boy's lifeless hand and he fell back a huddled heap upon the floor of the tavern, staining the board with his young life's blood. The landlord and I stared at him in horror, and ere I could turn upon De Papillon the outer door was again pushed open and on the threshold stood the old dame I had seen through the window.

'Ralph,' she said, 'it is time we were going if you have done,' and then her eyes fell upon the dark mass on the floor. With a shriek, which for many a night thereafter rang in my ears, she sprang forwards and threw herself upon the corpse, the blood staining her hands and clean, white cuffs. 'Ralph, Ralph!' she screamed aloud, 'my son, my bonny boy, speak to me! You are not dead? Great God! he is not dead, he cannot be! I was with him but a moment ago. Ralph, Ralph, what is the matter?' and she parted the fair hair that curled over his forehead and stared wildly into his pale, dead face. And then for the first time I think she saw the blood upon her hands, and a stony look came into her face, which curdled the blood in my veins.

I glanced at the Frenchman, and he was standing gazing at this awful scene with an annoyed look upon his face,

gnawing the ends of his long moustachios the while, but even at that moment I noticed a livid scar upon his left cheek and knew him for the man who had slain De Cusac.

By this time the dame had staggered to her feet and she saw me first.

‘You villain!’ she cried, her eyes blazing with a mad fury! ‘you have killed my boy, my only child, and I a widow.’

‘Nay, madam,’ said I gently, ‘but I am about to kill the man who did.’

CHAPTER VIII

OF THE SLAYING OF DE PAPILLON AND THE FINDING OF THE BOX

SHE stared at me as if she had not heard aright, and then, as I pointed to where the Frenchman stood, she turned and saw him, and before I could prevent her, had sprung upon him, tearing at his face with her nails, while he strove to beat her off. Fearing he would kill her also, I dragged her away and bade the landlord hold her up, and, as I heard her burst into a flood of tears, I knew that I need fear no longer for her reason, and turned to face the bully. I reached up and touched him on the shoulder, for he was leaving the room, then, drawing my rapier, I stood before him, placing myself in positon.

‘Now, sir,’ I said.

‘Well,’ said he, *mon aigre*, I have no quarrel with you.’

‘But I with you,’ I answered fiercely, for my blood was up and my wrath roused as it had never been before.

‘On what count?’ said he.

‘You have murdered this poor lad.’

‘A nasty word, little man—a nasty word—slain fairly in a duel.’

‘Slain as foully as the man you slew upon the shore of Fife,’ I thundered.

He started at this, and his face grew dark.

‘You speak in riddles,’ he sneered.

I said nothing, but, clenching my fist, I sprang up at him and struck him so fearful a blow upon the mouth that he reeled backwards and spat out teeth and blood.

‘*Mon Dieu !*’ he roared in fury, and then, mastering himself, he said again,—

‘A moment, sir, but if you are not of birth I shall

strangle you. I do not use my sword to fight with the *canaille*.'

'Have no fear,' I answered, as coolly as himself, 'my uncle is Sir Roger Clephane of Connel.'

'Is it so?' said he, 'is it so? Then his nephew dies this day.'

'That may or may not be, sir,' I answered, 'but I pray God there may be a bully and a murderer the less in this world when I have done with you, and, mark you, there is no brown box between us.'

Then we fell to.

Even to this day, when I think of that fight in the little tavern with the sunlight streaming through the windows and falling on the murdered boy and the blood-stained floor, on the stricken mother and the frightened landlord, on the spilled wine and half-finished food, and on the side of the Frenchman's face showing up the scar of the pistol bullet, even yet, I say, I feel the blood go coursing through my old veins at quickened speed and I clench my bony hands and set what few teeth remain to me, for, of all contests I have fought—and I have fought many a one—this was the hardest and the most fierce.

Silently, save for the click, click of the sword blades, we thrust and parried, feigned and lunged, and I can call to mind no outside sound but the hard breathing of De Papillon and the buzzing of a fly upon the window pane.

And yet I felt that I should kill him in the long-run, for had not De Cusac got the better of him, till he had kicked the box against his legs, but little did I dream in what strange manner that fight was to end. He was so tall and yet so quick that I could not touch him for a while, and he wounded me twice—once in the neck and once upon the hand; but at last I thrust him through the forearm and he winced and swore below his breath, though he kept on fighting.

In vain I strove to finish the combat, but I could not get within his guard, and I felt the want of food begin to tell upon me and knew that I was growing weak. He knew this also, as I could see from the glitter in his black, beady eyes, which seemed to stand out of his head as he glared at me, and a sneering smile came upon his face, as, taking

advantage of a weak parry, he all but run me through. At last I saw my only chance was the old wrist stroke; but yet I felt I could not kill him when unarmed, and I began to doubt the ending of the fight.

Still better gain a breathing space than die at once, I thought, and as he came at me again I gave the twist, but as his rapier went flying from him mine slipped from my grasp and both fell clattering on the floor. We stood looking at each other for a moment, and then he ran back a little space, and, putting down his head, charged full at me as a ram might.

Had he struck me he would have killed me then and there, but it was not to be, for, as he reached me, I raised my leg and bent my knee so that my thigh was below his head, and with a sudden swing I brought my clenched fist down upon his skull with all my force, and bone met bone.

There was a dull thud as when a bullock is struck in the shambles, and the Frenchman rolled over on his back, jerking his legs a while and then lying still, while my arm tingled to the shoulder socket with the blow. He made a horrid sight as he lay there, the blood trickling from his nostrils and streaming over his baggy cheeks, and his eyes protruding from their sockets further than they ever had done, or, for that matter, ever would, till they left them for good and all. The landlord left the poor old dame, who was sitting by her boy's side stroking his face and weeping quietly, and looked to the bully to see if he was dead, but I knew that it was useless and told him so, for as I struck him I had felt his head split beneath my fist as a pumpkin splits.

I picked up my sword, therefore, and after bidding the frightened landlord see to the body I limped out of the room, but not at the door by which I had entered, for I was minded to make an end of the mystery of the brown box, and so I opened the door where I had first seen De Papillon. Closing it gently behind me, I found myself in a little space, with a door in the outer wall which opened to the back of the tavern and a flight of stairs which led upwards. I climbed the latter, feeling, I well remember, not a little sick and shaky in the limbs, for I had never slain a man before, and, moreover, the Frenchman's head had not been a soft one.

On reaching the top of the stairs, I came upon a landing with two doors opening from it. I listened at one of them, and, hearing nothing pushed it open and found myself in the dead man's room—if one was to judge from the great plumed hat with the silver clasp in it and a dagger with a chased handle which lay in a sheath upon the table. The room was small and lit by a skylight in the roof, but there was no sign of what I sought, and I knew I must needs be quick in my search.

High and low I looked for the little box—under the bed and bedding, under the plumed hat, in every corner, upon the two beams which ran across the roof, but I could find it nowhere.

I could hear the voices of people coming to the tavern door and feared to stay longer, but when I turned to steal quietly away my foot caught on something, and I went sprawling on the floor. Cursing my luck, and dreading that the noise I had made would bring a nest of hornets about my ears, I picked myself up and then saw that my toe had struck against a great nail which stuck upwards from the flooring, and which had been the cause of my tripping. The next moment I was like to shout for joy as I saw that the plank in which the nail was set had been loosened, and judged that I had found the hiding-place of the spoil of De Papillon. I wrenched the board up, and there, as I had thought, was the little box, lying snugly in a hole under the flooring. Whipping it out, I replaced the board, and not forgetting the dagger, which I opined might prove useful, I stole downstairs and so out, hiding my precious burden under my dress and meeting no one.

It was not long ere I was back in my little room at the Luckenbooths, for I was not minded to linger long in Leith, nor did I fancy an evening walk between the hedgerows. When I was once again in my old quarters I locked the door, and, taking care I was not overlooked by any window on the other side of the street, I set the little box upon the table and tried to open it. It was locked, but that was not much of an obstacle, and ere long I had thrown the lid back and its contents were revealed to me. I lifted out a great bundle of papers, mottled and dis-

coloured, bound round with a piece of red silk and sealed with a great yellow seal, which was cracked across.

Underneath was a little bag of canvas stuff, and, as I lifted it out with care, I felt my troubles lifted also, for by its weight and feel I knew that it contained money, and plenty of it. I opened it at once and poured out a stream of gold and silver coins, which made a cheerful noise as they tinkled on the table and made as though to roll over its edge upon the floor. Picking up a handful of them, I found that, for the most part, they were French—crowns and livres, if I remember aright—with only here and there a Scottish merk or penny, but, as French coins were much in use in those days, there was but little at which to grumble. As I undid the seal, which bore no device upon it, for there was nothing further in the box, there came a sharp rapping at the door and the voice of the old dame with whom I lodged called on me to open. I hastened to push the box with the papers in it below my pallet and hid the money upon my person. Then, as if but just awakened from a sleep, I yawned loudly and called out to know what was wanted of me.

‘I would speak with you, Master Clephane,’ said she, in her shrill voice.

‘Very good,’ I answered, and, crossing the room, I threw open the door. ‘Well, dame,’ said I, ‘what is the matter? There is no one come for me, is there?’

‘There is no one save me, Master Clephane, but I can no longer have you here, for I need the room and you have paid me naught this week.’

‘Ah, is that all, dame?’ I answered. ‘Then I had best pay you now,’ and I drew out my purse and poured a handful of coins into my palm.

She started at the sight and looked surprised.

‘I crave your pardon,’ said she. ‘There is no manner of hurry, sir.’

‘By no means, dame,’ said I. ‘I had forgotten it was due. This is your charge, I think?’ and I paid her in Scottish coins for the most part. ‘Good even to you, and bring me my supper in an hour’s time,’ and with that I shut the door and locked it, leaving her to wonder where I had gotten my sudden riches, but I did not fear her tongue, for

I knew she was a very silent woman and a stranger in the place.

Again I drew out the papers and opened them, casting off their coverings, which had clearly been wet and soaked through at some time, and I judged I knew when and where. At last I reached written matter, and spread it out before me, but as I looked at it I trembled with excitement, and then, passing my hand wearily across my forehead, I wondered if there was any truth or any righteousness in the world, for, by the papers before me, I learned, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that De Cusac had lied to me. It was no marvel that he had no wish to be seen in Kirkcoun. It was no marvel that he had dwelt upon the cold and lonesome shore and had sat naked and shivering upon the reef. It was no marvel to me now, for his secret was a secret no longer.

The papers contained nothing more nor less than the plans of a great plot to liberate the Queen of Scots and set her on the throne of England, a plot so cunning and so well devised that I could not doubt it would succeed, backed as it was by men whose names I had heard spoken of even in Kirkcoun—men in Scotland, men in England, men in France, ay, and even in Spain.

Good luck! I grew hot with excitement when I found that in my keeping I held on the one hand the life of the beautiful, unfortunate and wicked Queen, and on the other the lives of over a hundred nobles and gentlemen of high degree.

My hand shook as I read on, and my brain whirled as I wondered at the strange freak which had thrown such a burden on my shoulders. I read and re-read the papers, and sat staring at them till a rap at the door reminded me of the dame and my supper.

Despite my hunger, I was too anxious to eat overmuch, and soon pushed my plate from me and fell to thinking again after once more reading over this precious document. The more I read the more doubtful did I become as to what course I should follow, and, at last, I could sit still no longer, and, hiding the papers in a safe place, I left the room, locking the door behind me, and strode down the steep stairs to see if my brain would cool in the night air

and my plans take shape. It had grown dark and there was a spit of rain in the air, but I cared nothing for the wet and walked briskly down the steep street, a thousand fancies chasing through my mind.

I might do three things with this knowledge as far as I could see, and I doubted which course to take, for if I played my cards *well* there awaited me, I well knew, some great reward, while if *badly*, then my head would be the forfeit as certainly as I was called the Squat. There was but one of the plans whereby I could neither loose or gain, for I could destroy the papers and none be a whit the wiser ; but I was not minded to take it, albeit I might have known from the fate of my grandfather how dangerous a thing it is to meddle with affairs of State. Should I then use this power as De Cusac doubtless would have used it had he not died at the hands of De Papillon ?

Should I go to a certain noble's house in this very city and be the means of causing war and an upturning of nations ; be the instrument whereby the old religion would once more be established, not only in Scotland but in England ; be, in very truth, the liberator of the unhappy captive, who in English dungeons had wasted her beauty and her youth ? The thought stirred me. I was a Scotsman and the Queen was Scotch, a Stuart of the royal blood, a scion of the old line of the Bruce, and now she lay a hapless captive and her fate rested with me, the ex-dominie of Kirktown.

And then another thought came into my mind and I remembered my father's old tales of the burnings and the martyrs, of the fat and sensuous priests who were a curse to the land, of the voice of the great Reformer as he thundered forth his condemnations from the pulpit of the old cathedral, of the blood which had been shed and the deeds done to free the land and wipe away the pall of ignorance and superstition which had blighted a brave people. I thought of all this, I say ; the Protestant blood within me swept away my doubts. I was resolved what I would do—the new faith would be safe and Elizabeth of England should reign as heretofore.

God knows ! I may have been a fool to think that it all rested with me, that the fate of nations was in my hands,

and that I could change the course of history at a single stroke, but I was young then, young and ardent, and perchance a trifle easily roused to excitement and the hope of great things, but, after all, it mattered little, for, as I made up my mind and stopped to consider what I should do next, my ears caught the sound of footsteps behind me, stealthy footsteps as of a cat that creeps upon a bird.

Restraining a wish to look behind, I loosened my sword within its sheath and wished I had taken De Papillon's dagger with me ; then I walked on again and purposely made for a dark corner to see if by any chance I might learn the meaning of these sounds. Straining my ears, I listened closely and could hear them coming nearer and nearer, and again I felt the cold shiver in my back as I had done when the cattle charged me.

Next moment I had passed into the shadow of a balcony, the steps quickened, came close behind me and ceased, then silently and swiftly I swung round upon my heels and gripped with both my hands an arm which held aloft a dagger.

The arm struck downwards as I grasped it, but with a sharp wrench I bent it with all my force, and as the bones snapped like a stick cracked across the knee, a low groan burst from the man who owned both arm and dagger and had his face muffled in a cloak.

'What is this, sir?' I hissed, whipping out my rapier.

Struggling fiercely he strove to break away, but I held him as in a vice, and could hear the bone ends grate, one against another, as he pulled and tugged.

Seeing it was useless he ceased at length and stood quietly, cursing me the while, then, seeing he was in a fit state to listen to me, I wheeled him round, and setting my rapier's point against his back, I bade him sternly go forwards, and in this strange fashion I brought him home with me, for there were none to hinder us, the rain falling heavily and the night being, as I have said, a dark one.

CHAPTER IX

OF THE CRAWL UPON THE ROOF, THE PLOT AND COUNTER-PLOT

WHEN I had set him down opposite me at the table I stood and looked at him long and steadfastly, nor did he seem to like it, for he would not meet my eye, but kept glancing about him furtively as if to find some way of escape. He was a small man, not much taller than myself, but thin and wiry with a meek rather than a bad face, but his bloodshot eyes and puffy cheeks told of many a debauch, while his breath had an odour as of the lees of wine.

'So, sir,' I said to him after a time, 'you would have killed me?'

He answered me nothing, but bent his head upon his hand, and his useless arm dangled by his side.

'What is your name?' I asked.

'Crauford,' he answered, in a hoarse voice.

'Well, Master Crauford,' said I, without thinking I was about to do the very thing I warned him against, 'you will find it no jest to meddle with matters of State, for you see you have not found the papers and you have lost your life in trying to find them.'

'What,' he cried, 'you would not kill me, and in cold blood?'

I shrugged my shoulders.

'There is no other way left me,' I said. 'It is your life against mine, and I had rather it were yours.'

'But,' said he, 'I am in search of no papers.'

'You are not in search of the papers of the Papish plot?' I cried, staring at him, and then wishing I had bitten off my tongue ere I had said this.

'Not I,' he replied eagerly.

'Then why try to stab me, a man unknown to you?'

'You are not unknown to me.'

'But I have never set eyes on you before, at least to my knowledge.'

'Perchance not, but Dick Honeyman has, and owes you a grudge.'

'And he hired you to make an end of me?'

He nodded, and I saw it all, and saw also that, even as before, I must kill this man, for now he knew—thanks to my foolish tongue—the secret of De Cusac. He must have read my face, for he sprang up and began pleading with me for his life, wildly and passionately promising to keep the secret if only I let him live.

'Peace, fool!' I said, 'or it will not be a secret long.'

'But you told it me yourself,' said he, 'you told it me yourself.'

'No doubt,' I answered, 'no doubt, and I have no wish to kill you, but I see no other way.'

'Oh, sir,' he pleaded, 'you can keep me here; you can bind me and keep me fast under lock and key, if you will, but I am not fit to die. Have mercy! I pray have mercy!' and in his fear he clung to me.

'Sit down,' said I, 'and stir not till I think about this matter.'

I was not long this time in making up my mind. If I killed this man I would have his body on my hands, whereas, if I shut him up till I had proclaimed the plot, he could not harm me nor would I have his blood upon my soul. I knew, moreover, that the old dame had another room unoccupied where I might tie him up, and I need not stint myself of the gold I had found in the brown box; nor am I sure but that I was a trifle touched by his miserable appearance as he sat opposite me, with the candle light playing upon his white and anxious face, in which hope and fear struggled for the mastery, while he winced every now and then as some twinge of pain thrilled through his broken arm.

Taking with me the dag, his dagger, and the dagger of De Papillon, so that he was unarmed and could do me no harm, I bade him sit still till I returned, and went out,

locking the door behind me. I walked along the narrow passage upon which my room opened to the kitchen, where the old woman lived, and telling her that I had a sick friend who must have a room to himself, I bargained for her other attic as I did not wish to appear too wealthy lest I should arouse her suspicions.

This matter being settled to her great satisfaction, I returned to my room and unlocking the door threw it open, but as my eyes travelled over the bare attic I gave a cry of rage and surprise, for it was empty and my prisoner was gone. My first thought was for the papers, and I rushed across the room to the concealed recess where I had hidden them, but, to my joy, found them safe and untouched, and then I stared around me, wondering how the villain could have escaped. There was but one way I soon saw, and that was through the opened window which was built some way back upon the roof after the new fashion, and yet who would have thought that a man with a broken arm would have ventured out upon the steep, wet and slippery roof, which even at its edge was full thirty feet above the street. There was but one thing for it now, as if he escaped me I was doomed, and hastily unbuckling my rapier I left it behind me, and grasping a dagger in one hand I crawled out upon the roof. Clinging to the window sill, I listened for any sound that might tell me which way the villain had gone, and at last I heard a faint clattering sound away to my right and above me as of someone clambering over the tiles.

There was not a moment to lose, but it was hard work even for me, compact though I was, to make my way along the slope, for the wind was whistling right merrily up here amongst the housetops, and the slash of the rain confused and blinded me. I groped my way onwards, however, sliding and slipping, and soon, to my joy, heard the sound grow louder though I could see nothing, but what was my disgust and alarm to find it caused merely by a couple of loose tiles with which the wind was sporting.

I clung to the roof and listened again, but could hear nothing beyond the call of the night watch far below, the sough of the wind amongst the chimneys and gables, and the splutter of the drenching rain. It was no use I saw, and

turned cautiously to make my way back again, but what was my fear and horror to see, by the light which streamed from the window of my room, the dark form of a man, which, even as I looked, crept upwards and disappeared from my sight.

Next moment I was slipping and sliding down the roof rapidly and recklessly, and all but rolled down and over into the street more than once. At last I reached the window sill, and, carefully dragging myself upwards, I looked into the attic. I saw at once that I had been outwitted, for Crauford was in the room again and looking for the papers. He must have hidden himself near the window till he had seen me creep out in pursuit, and I only marvelled that he had not pushed me over into the street, but, perchance, he feared his broken arm and called to mind the wrench I had given him under the balcony. As this passed through my mind I saw him begin to pry about near the recess where I had hidden the papers, and judged the time had come to finish his little game. The fool had left the window open behind him, and very softly I drew myself across the sill, and getting on my feet, reached out for my rapier which I had left in a corner.

It slipped as I touched it, making a slight noise against the wall and the man started, then catching sight of me he rushed wildly to the door and, pulling it open, disappeared. Scarce waiting to draw my sword from its sheath I darted after him, but, as ill-luck would have it, ran full into the arms of the dame, who, hearing the noise, had come to see what the matter might be, and but narrowly escaped being run through. Over we rolled, and I could hear the villain's footsteps growing fainter as he ran down the long stairs, and by the time I got to my feet, pushed aside the old woman and reached the street, he was nowhere to be seen.

I was foiled and returned slowly to my room, where I found the old dame groaning over a sore head and not best pleased with me, but I told her my friend had gone wrong in his mind owing to his grievous sickness, and I pacified her with a piece of silver and bound up the cut upon her temple.

Things had come to a pretty pass with me now, I thought, after I had again seen that the papers were safe, and, for

the third time that day, I had to make up my mind as to what I should do. There was no doubt this Crauford, being in the pay of Dick Honeyman, would tell him all, and after that it was but a brief step to the gibbet, which I had seen in use more than once, and I liked not the look of it. Therefore, fear sharpening my wits, I soon had my plan ready, and bathing the wounds De Papillon had given me, for they smarted sorely, albeit they were but slight, I sought my couch, hoping only that Master Honeyman would think well upon these weighty matters before he acted, otherwise my plan was like to fail, for time was everything to me and I could do nothing till the morrow.

I was astir very early in the morning, and having seen to my wounds and taken in a good supply of provender—for I have ever found that there is nought like a full stomach when one has work on hand—I dressed with care and circumspection and finally sallied out, looking, I flattered myself, not a whit the worse for having slain a French bully and broken the arm of a would-be assassin, to say nothing of an old dame's head.

You will wonder, no doubt, what my plan was, but when I tell you that I took my way to the Horse Wynd you will have an inkling of my plot if you remember aught of De Berault, the master of fence. In very truth, I thanked the Lord that Master Honeyman had, as I hoped, delivered himself into my hands by boasting to me of the manner in which he had learned the art, though I smiled grimly to myself when I remembered that his lessons had not included the knowledge of the wrist stroke of De Cusac, for my first step was to find where this arch villain lived, and I reckoned that De Berault could tell me this, but even with this thought had come the fear that I might not find the Frenchman.

But find the Frenchman I did, for he had a great notice hung out at number three of the Wynd, which itself is but a bow shot from the palace, and I was soon ushered into his presence. He was unlike either of his two countrymen I had known, for he was a stately old man with white hair and a bristling moustachios, tall and well built, and with a bow which would have put poor De Cusac's nose out of joint.

Seeing in me, as he believed, a fresh pupil he was most suave and gracious, and I thought it wise to let him think I might take lessons from him, but I gave him to understand that I was but newly come into the town and had heard much of [him from my worthy friend, Master Richard Honeyman, whom I much longed to visit, but knew not where he lived.

Ten minutes, thereafter, the worthy master of fence bowed me out upon the street with the knowledge that Master Richard Honeyman lived in the Wynd of the Blackfriars as it was still called—though the Black Friars had left naught but a memory behind them, and that not a savoury one, I opine.

Thither I soon took my way after paying a visit to the Luckenbooths and getting the papers which I once more carried in the brown box hidden under my cloak, a new one which I had bought me.

In this fashion I came to the Wynd and concealed myself in an entry opposite the house, wherein, as De Berault had told me, Dick Honeyman was lodged. In the first place, however, I gave a lad a groat to throw a handful of earth and stones against each of the windows, and at one of them, from my hiding-place, I was mightily pleased in a short time to see the face of Dick Honeyman appear, and over his shoulder a second face peered out, the face of Crauford, the would-be assassin. They shook their fists at the urchin, who made off as I had told him, and I waited patiently for them to leave the house as I knew they must ere long.

Fully an hour passed, however, ere they sallied forth, my friend of the previous night having his arm in a sling and looking very pale and sickly. They talked in low tones to each other and strode away up the street intent upon I well knew what.

I had not a moment to lose, and as soon as they were gone from sight I crossed the road and, climbing the stairs, knocked loudly at a door upon the right, which, from the position of the windows, I judged to be that of the house where these two worthies lodged, or, at least, where Dick Honeyman abode. It was opened to me by a wrinkled and sour-visaged woman who eyed me with suspicion.

'Is Master Honeyman within?' said I.

'And if he is,' said the woman, 'what may you want with him?'

'What?' said I, as if surprised, 'and is this the fashion after which folk are treated in a city? My certes, I will hie me back to Kirktown again!'

'Art from Kirktown then?' she asked.

'That am I, woman,' said I, 'and have known Dick Honeyman since ever he was a suckling.'

'And you wish to see him?'

'Good lack! what else dost think I am here for?'

'Then he is out.'

'Out?' said I, feigning sorrow at the news, 'but I will wait for him.'

'He owes you naught?' she inquired of me, in a tone which told me it was not the first time she had asked the question.

'On the contrary,' said I, 'it is I who owe him something, and being an honest man would pay him withal.'

At that she let me into his room, little thinking what it was I owed him and in what fashion I should pay my debt.

The room which I now entered was a very different one from my little attic in the Luckenbooths, and I gazed with much respect at the tapestries on the wall, at the crossed foils, the carved chairs and the great punch bowl set in the centre of the table; but as soon as the woman had closed the door and left me to myself I searched for a place where I might put the little box, and finally bestowed it behind a piece of tapestry whereon was worked a hunting scene with much skill and prettiness. It was sufficient of a hiding-place and yet not too secret a one, and I made no doubt the papers would be found in due time; then I sat down and waited, after having inspected a closet where I might hide should the two worthies return.

Happily for me there was no sign of them within twenty minutes, and calling the woman I said I would return after a time—for which lie may God forgive me—and I put her in a good humour by leaving a small piece of silver in her palm, then I went out into the street again, and thus having, as hey say nowadays, laid the mine, I prepared to fire it.

I had hardly reached the top of the Wynd when I saw what I wished and expected to see, to wit the two rogues going down the High Street with a bodyguard of the town watch led by a fat, little man with a paunch like the breast of a turkey cock and a strut like a bantam's, one and all looking mightily important, and making, I had no doubt, for a certain room under the eaves of the Luckenbooths.

The moment they caught sight of me there was a fine to-do.

'There he is,' shouted Crauford, 'at the head of the Wynd. Seize him, in the King's name!'

They stopped and stared mightily when I walked quietly towards them, and ere they could lay hands on me I called out to the leader.

'Ha worshipful sir, so you have the villains! Prettily done, prettily done; but were it not well to make them fast, for if you lose them now, you are like to lose your head as well.'

'What,' stuttered the little man, 'what is this? I arrest you in the King's name! See to it Watt and Cunninghame.'

At this I burst into a roar of laughter, and seeing a crowd gathering I called out to him loudly,—

'So they have played the old trick again. In truth, I had not thought they would have taken you by it, but they will be off; in the name of Queen Bess, I charge you to arrest these men on a plea of high treason to the realm and the good estate of the Church.'

'But, but,' he stuttered, 'it is you who are the traitor.'

'Good lack!' I shouted, 'what a fat head it is! The papers are in their rooms at this very moment! Dost not see I am in search of these very rogues on behalf of her serene Majesty Elizabeth of England? Guard them closely as you value your head, sir. I will to the palace this moment. Their rooms are at six of the Blackfriars' Wynd, there you will find the papers of the Papish plot, and see you let not these villains free. To the Tolbooth with them!'

The crowd, carried away by my seeming rage, and hearing but one side of the question, joined in the cry,—

'To the Tolbooth with the Papishers! Death to the traitors! See to it, Master Bennett, see to it!' they roared till the little man was fairly bewildered. As he hesitated I

whispered in his ear, 'If you do not hurry, some other will get these papers and the reward, and all your trouble will go for naught.'

At this, despite their outcry, he caused Honeyman and Crauford to be bound and guarded with all care, and then set off for number six of the Wynd, followed by a great crowd, who began to pelt these two unfortunates with evil-smelling eggs and all manner of refuse from the street to their no small discomfort.

'*Fortuna favet fortibus*,' said I to myself, and pushed my way through the crowd shouting loudly,—

'In the King's name hinder me not!' and keeping a sharp outlook for a dagger point, as there might well be some privy to the plot in the throng.

The folk parted before me to let me pass, and I heard them muttering, 'The English spy,' 'Did he find them?' 'Nay, 'twas Master Bennett,' 'There will be hangings for this,' and a dozen similar fragments of their talk.

I was soon free of them and swaggered off as quickly as might be down the street towards the palace, and none followed me, being, as was but natural, more taken up with two traitors than a single spy, and that a squat one.

CHAPTER X

OF THE CREW OF THE GALLEY AND THE SILENT MAN WHO SQUINTED

AS soon as I might do so with safety I turned down a side street; and when no one was in sight took to my heels and ran as fast as I could towards Leith, where I resolved to hide till I could get aboard some craft. I had need of hurry, for I well knew that sooner or later the true tale would be out, albeit the finding of the papers would keep them on the wrong track for a time, at least so long as the direction of affairs rested with the thick-brained Master Bennett.

This was what all my fine ideas had come to I thought, as I paused to take breath. Instead of some great reward, and much honour and glory, I was a panting fugitive, likely soon to become an exile or perchance a corpse; but at the thought of the latter I tightened my belt and set off again, thanking God I had my good sword with me and knew the old wrist stroke of De Cusac.

Not an hour had passed from the time I left the High Street till I stood at the door of a small tavern on the wharf, for I had no wish to see the inside of the 'Wood Arms' again, and I thought a few folk had turned and stared hard at me, though whether this was because of the slaying of De Papillon or on account of my strange build I knew not, and you may be sure I did not tarry to ask them.

I had no fear of entering the tavern, for I hoped to find some mariner within, and judged I could deal with any brawler in the village if occasion should arise.

Therefore I boldly pushed the door open and walked in, and I could see mine host start as he saw me, and opined he knew the story of my fight with the Frenchman.

At the table, however, were seated a couple of men the like of whom I had never seen before. They were dressed after the fashion of seamen, yet in more gaudy colours than such affect, and wore great boots, with wide, flapping tops.

The one was a thick-set, black-bearded fellow, who wore a chain and whistle, the other a round-faced man, exceeding fat and clean-shaven, save for a gathering of fair and stubbly hair upon his double chin. As I entered, the bearded man caught sight of me.

'Jeremiah,' he roared out, 'what is this?'

'Nay, sir,' said I, 'you are but a trifle wrong; I am called Jeremy.'

'A wit!' he shouted. 'By Saint Christopher Columbus, a wit. What figure is he, Phil? Hast got the lie of him?'

'He is a square, methinks,' answered the other, in a queer, piping voice, 'a square, but with appendages.'

'Tangents, belike,' said the bearded man.

'Nay, nay, dost not know that only a circle may have a tangent, while—'

'To the devil with such nonsense,' shouted the other; 'tangent or no tangent, square, circle or rumple tow, you shall drink with us, sir.'

'That,' said I, 'depends on what you drink.'

'A canny fellow, I trow,' he said, 'but I know not what it is and care less. 'Tis wine of some sort, and wets the throttle,' and he poured out a bumper for me.

I drained it off forthwith, but it had a vile taste and I made a grimace over it.

'Well,' said he, 'how dost like it?'

'Excellently well,' I answered, with the taste of the stuff still upon my tongue.

At this they both roared with laughter.

'Gad!' said the bearded man, 'an' you had a fair measure of strength, I would have you join our company, for you are a man after mine own heart.'

At that, seeing a way out of my difficulties, and, as I hoped, out of Leith, I answered quietly,—

'Strength is but a small matter, sirs, but, perchance, you can do this?' and taking the edge of the table with both my hands I put out all my force upon it, and with a quick jerk broke it across.

'Jeremiah!' shouted the one.

'*Quod est demonstrandum,*' squeaked the other.

'Look ye,' said the bearded man, 'canst use that pig-sticker of yours?'

'Use it?' said the landlord, who had been staring at me open-mouthed; 'why, this is the fellow who slew that foreign swashbuckler of whom I told ye.'

'Gad!' said the bearded man, 'is it so? Then listen. I am Captain Hew Dysart, an honest trader; this Phil Bartelow, as worthy and, if you will, as fat a navigator as ever trod deck. We have a good galley in the roads and a merry crew; what say you to join with us?'

'But,' said I, 'though I can make shift to sail a boat, I know naught of great ships.'

'You will ne'er learn younger,' said the man who called himself Dysart, 'and Phil here can teach you anything, from what a circle is to the way of walking a plank with your eyes shut,' and at this they laughed long and loudly.

'And what may a circle be?' said I.

'A circle,' said the fat man, closing one of his dim, blue eyes and thus screwing up his face, 'a circle is that which hath a circumference, but is void in the interior.'

'Like a certain Phil Bartelow, his head,' said the bearded man.

'Go to, go to! the jest is old, and hath a line drawn round it externally,' continued the fat man.

'As thou shalt have some day, Phil.'

'A murrain on you for an untimely gabbler,' said the fat man.

'Well,' said the other, 'the wine is finished; what say you to our offer?'

'What do ye trade in?' I asked, being in doubt.

'Cargo,' said he, 'the cargo varies. Phil, does't not?'

'Ay, ay,' quoth the fat man. 'From English goods to Dutch cheeses and Norse hides.'

'Well,' said the other, 'wilt join?'

'"Tis a roving life
And a rolling life,"

as the poet hath it; but what in thunder is this?'

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There was the sound of horse hoofs, and then a hammering at the door which I had closed behind me.

'I opine,' said I, 'it is for me; but, sirs, I am with you.'

'Then this way,' said Hew Dysart and opening a window at the back of the tavern he jumped out and we followed him, the worthy navigator puffing mightily in the process, and well-nigh sticking fast. Keeping the house between us and those who were making the uproar, we ran for the water's edge, some fifty yards away, where a boat lay fastened to an iron ring.

We were half-way to it when we were discovered, and a crowd came rushing after us, led by a man on horseback, who, without fail, would have overtaken us had not Dysart whipped a pistol from a sash he wore under his loose coat and fired at him, hitting the horse, which stumbled and fell.

Next moment we reached the boat, and, getting in, cast her off and soon pulled out of pistol shot, leaving the pursuers to dance with rage at the end of the wharf, for they were some time in finding another boat.

'Ha, ha!' laughed Dysart, 'this is a jest after mine own heart, for an honest trader sees little of war and blood, and every man has a taste for it, even our worthy navigator here.'

'God forbid!' said the other, 'I have a loathing of it.'

'They have got a boat there,' said I.

'Then let us give way again, Master Jeremy. Your other name is—'

'Clephane.'

'A goodly mouthful,' said the fat man.

'And how came you, Master Clephane, to be in this plight?'

'You forget,' said I, 'that I slew a Frenchman yesterday.'

'So, so,' said he, 'you are well out o't then. There is the galley,' and he pointed to a long, low vessel painted a dark green colour, with two masts and great yards whereon sail was being set.

She had a row of holes along the side, which I thought looked small for ports, and found afterwards were for great oars called sweeps, with which she was propelled when the wind failed her. In twenty minutes we were aboard, the

anchor was hove up to her bows, then with the westerly wind bellied out her great sails she gathered way and slipped along, a froth of bubbles streaming from her stern and her sharp bow plunging into the swell, while the boat which had pursued us turned for the shore. I looked about me in wonder, for I had never seen such a craft. I was standing on her poop, which was low and had a hatch-way with stairs descending, as I found afterwards, to a great cabin in her stern.

Forward, in the waist, were benches ranged crosswise, with the long oars of which I have spoken lashed to them inside the bulwarks, and still further forwards was a fore-deck curving upwards to a huge bowsprit, with a cross spar on which a little sail was set. In the waist twenty or thirty men were gathered, and I called to mind Hew Dysart's words as to a merry crew. Merry or no, they were a most villainous-looking lot, in gay-coloured caps and leathern jerkins, with waistbands in which knives were stuck, and they lounged and spat copiously. I liked not the look of them, but still less did I like the look of four cannon upon the poop, and the same number upon the fore-deck; and again I called to mind the words of Hew Dysart, that an honest trader sees but little of war and bloodshed, and I wondered much why the cannon were there.

'Ha!' said the captain, who must have seen my wondering gaze, 'these be a strange cargo for the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, but we are bound for Biscay Bay, and the Spanish and Portugals know little difference between a Scottish flag and an English one, and are as likely to trouble Saint Andrew's Cross as the Cross of Saint George, for they have forgotten old Andrew Wood and his doings.'

Now, though he was so glib with his tongue, yet somehow or other I mistrusted him, and feared I had fallen mayhap from the frying-pan into the fire; and an event which happened that same night served to strengthen my doubts and put me on my guard. It was growing dusk, and as I leant over the bulwarks of the fore-deck, whither I had wandered, watching the line of the southern shore and marking where the sea swept into the Bay of Aberlady, I became aware of a man who had come close to me so silently that I had not heard him, and indeed I would not

have known he was there had he not given a little cough as if to clear his throat.

As I turned my head to see him better, he spoke to me in a whisper.

'Hist, lad! keep looking shorewards and let none think I speak with you. How did you come to be on board this craft?'

'I rowed to it in a boat,' said I, not being minded to say overmuch to this fellow.

'Spoken like a Scot,' said he, and laughed softly to himself.

'Art not a Scotchman?' said I, whispering as he had done.

'Not I,' he answered; 'I am from England, and by name Simon Grisel.'

'Then,' said I, 'what do you on this craft?'

'Tit for tat,' he answered; 'there are half the nations under God's sun in this same *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, a murdering, thieving crew, and as you have not the look of such I thought well to warn you, lad, but mum's the word, I must away.' And as silently as he had come the man crept forwards, leaving me with a vague idea of a fallow-coloured face, an eye which squinted mightily and a hoarse whisper. Having been shown a little cabin in the stern where I was to sleep, I soon went below, troubled in my mind at what this fellow had told me, and at what I had seen for myself; but, despite all this, and the chorus of some filthy song which came to my ears, sung by Phil Bartelow an' one were to judge by the queer piping tune of it, I soon fell asleep, being wearied by the strain and excitement of the day.

When I woke I lay wondering where I might be, for there was a sound of creaking and splashing, and every now and then a thud, thud above me. Catching sight of the port-hole through which the light was streaming, I called to mind that I was on the galley, and by the heave and roll I judged we were well out to sea. I felt in nowise sick, as I have heard some do upon a first voyage, and rising, dressed myself and climbed on deck.

It was a fair and fresh morning, a merry breeze coming astern of us and singing through the rigging, while the white-topped waves chased us briskly as we plunged and staggered on under a press of sail. Away behind us was a faint, dark

line, which I took to be the Scottish coast, and there was naught else in sight save a few sea-birds, now poising themselves against the wind, anon wheeling and speeding before it, their black-tipped heads ever turning from side to side as they hunted for their prey.

'Tis a fine day, Master Clephane,' piped the fat navigator, rolling towards me with a kind of waddle, 'and the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* is making the best o't. An' this holds we shall not be long in making the Garonne, I warrant.'

'And where may that be?' said I, a trifle coldly, for I did not care overmuch for the man.

'Tis in France, lad, a noble river opening on Biscay Bay, and a fine place for wine and women, the which, ta'en together, are ever a sailor's best friends,' and away he rolled forwards, squeaking out an order to a few men who were busy over something in the waist.

I leant over the side and watched the foaming path we left in our wake, and noted the gleam of light on the green curve of the billows; and it seemed strange that I should be leaving the Scottish land in such a way, for if I had cared I need not have played the trick on Honeymen and Crauford, and I saw now that I had done so because I was not over anxious as to what became of me, and the freak suited my state of mind, and love of things which stir the frame and quicken the pulse.

For all that, I was glad we were bound for the country of De Cusac, and I judged, if all he said were true, it must be a land well worth the seeing; and then my thoughts went back to Kirkcaldy, with its bonny braes and waving woods, and, in spite of my efforts to the contrary, to Mistress Marjorie also, and I called to mind her fair face as I had first seen it, her smile and merry laugh, and as I thought upon it all I groaned aloud.

'What ho!' bellowed a voice at my ear, 'art sick, lad? Doth stomach feel topsy-turvy, and head light?'

I turned, and found the captain surveying me with a twinkle in his eyes.

'Nay,' I answered, 'I am not ill.'

'Then dost grieve over the Frenchman's soul, I warrant? Ah, lad! when you have slain— But where is Grisel? Pass the word for Simon to come aft!' he roared.

From a small door in the bulkhead of the fore deck, my silent friend of the previous night presently appeared, and coming quickly along a broad plank which led from bench to bench, he reached the poop.

I had a better view of him now, and have not often seen so strange a looking mortal. I had ever heard that Englishmen were beef-eaters, full fleshed and ruddy cheeked, but this specimen of one was tall, over six feet in height, and very lean, with a long and solemn face and a squinting eye. He was a big-boned man, howbeit, and I could fancy had no small measure of strength in his stringy carcass, but to my eye he looked little of a seaman, for most mariners are short and thick-set, and the greater number carry paunches, being fat and lazy ; at least it was so with such as I had seen before this time.

He never looked near me when he came up with us, but bent his head and swept out a leg in salute to the captain as if he had been a horse kicking, and then stood erect with the ghost of a smile upon his thin lips, and one hand upon his hip.

'Well, Simon,' said the captain, 'here we have another worthy fellow aboard the *Wisp*. His name is Master Jeremy Clephane, and he is desirous of learning somewhat as to sails and ropes, so you must even teach him.'

Again Simon kicked out behind him.

'This man,' said Dysart, turning to me, 'will tell you all you need know, and not being of the ship's company, as far as work is concerned, has time to do it well ; and now we shall break our fast, for the air is keen.'

There were only the captain and Bartelow at the meal, and I listened with wonder to their talk, though they dealt solely with the running of cargoes, castaway ships, fights with sea-rovers, and such-like topics ; but I wondered more at what the fat navigator ate, and thought on what De Cusac would have said had he seen him, for he stowed away a marvellous stomachful, to wit, the half of a great ham, and with it the better part of a bottle of pickled stuffs, a whole wheaten loaf, and the most of a fat fowl, and washed this down by a quart of ale, finishing in pleasant fashion with a huge draught of a drink like 'the kingdom,' of which I have told you.

The captain laughed mightily at my face as I watched this all-devouring worthy, and told me it was but a small feat, and that I should see Phil Bartelow eat after a hard day's work at stowing cargo; and at this they both nigh split themselves with mirth.

'Good lack!' thought I, 'if the crew be half as merry, then Hew Dysart hath not lied to me on that count,' and soon after I went upon deck again and spent the better part of that day learning of stays and braces, main and topsails, foresails and trysails, lubbers' holes and cross-trees, till my poor head could hold no more. Also I learned somewhat as to guiding a ship, with a promise of being taught the stars at night, though to be sure when night came I was over-tired to trouble about stars or aught else, for the sea air made me a mighty sleeper. I had but little chance for talk on other matters, but the Englishman again warned me, and when I doubted him smiled to himself and said, 'Bide a wee,' and then asked me how I liked his Scotch, and laughed when I told him he would break his jaw over it.

'If this is such a craft, what do you on it?' I said.

'Softly, softly, lad,' said he, and laid a finger to the side of his thin nose, nor would he tell me more, but hinted that before long I might know all; and seeing Phil Bartelow approaching, he fell to teaching me again, leaving me in a frame of mind very far from pleasant, and wishing I had never set foot on the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*.

CHAPTER XI

OF THE STEERING OF PHIL BARTELOW AND THE FIGHT WITH THE QUEEN'S SHIP

AS Simon Grisel had said, it was not long ere I found out the true nature of the galley and her crew—and that in a fashion which made my blood boil, and turned me sick.

The next day we had a taste of dirty weather and made but little way, splashing and squattering on the seas, and pitching into the curling waves till the sail upon the bowsprit was drenched with brine. It calmed during the next night, however, and it was on the morning of the following day that I had my eyes opened. When I reached the poop I stared about me in surprise, and wondered what had come over the vessel in the night-time. Her yards were askew, her sails ragged and torn, and as she rolled upon the smooth swell she looked battered and forlorn as if half wrecked by a tempest.

Only a half-dozen of the crew were upon the deck and in the waist, but I noted a stack of small arms in racks around each mast, and there was powder and shot by the side of each cannon.

A man was waving a flag over the side, and looking seawards I saw about a mile off a barque with two masts and dirty sails, bluff-bowed and ugly, rising and falling on the swell and heading for us.

‘What has befallen us?’ said I to the captain, who was gazing through a long glass at the craft to windward.

‘We are in a bad way, lad,’ said he, ‘and must have help. Yonder is a Norse ship which will give us that same, I trust, for she has seen our signal.’

‘Are we like to sink?’ I asked.

'I trust not, I trust not,' he answered, 'but God only knows!' and he turned away and called out for the ship to be pumped. The galley must have sprung a leak, I thought, as I watched the water gushing from her, and I could see the men on the Norse barque pointing to us, for she was drawing close. As I stood thus Simon passed near me, and I asked him if we were like to go down.

'Nay, my friend,' he whispered, staring straight in front of him, 'but that poor barque is—this is but a ruse. You will go below an' you take my advice.'

I turned cold as he said this, but I was not minded to leave the deck, for I knew not where the truth lay, and feared to be below if the galley sank; but I began to see that Simon spoke truth, and I felt sick at heart for the Norsemen.

'Hey ho!' came a hail from the strange ship, and then a voice in a foreign tongue.

'We have started a plank,' bellowed back the captain, making a hollow of his hands; 'canst send us a boat, for we be short handed?'

The man who had hailed us waved his hand, and a little boat which had been towing astern of the barque was hauled alongside her, and, three men dropping into her, she was rowed towards us while the barque backed her topsail and lay-to, riding easily upon the smooth rollers, black and square-sterned, and yet no ugly picture as the morning sun gleamed upon her black hull and squat masts.

As I turned from looking at her, I saw that Simon had, indeed, spoken truth, for half the crew of the galley lay hidden under the benches in the waist, and the small arms were gone from the racks. Seeing this I was about to call out to the men in the boat when I felt a cold ring placed against my temple, and squinting round I saw Phil Bartelow at my side, and judged a pistol was held against my head.

'Gently, my young ruffler,' said he, 'twill not take long, and your stomach will harden to it even as mine did. See to the parabola the boat yonder makes upon the swell.'

I said nothing, but watched the Norsemen in silence.

As they came alongside, the man who had waved the flag threw a short rope over the side, and, one after the other,

two of them climbed up it and stepped over the bulwarks. As each stepped down a hand was clapped upon his mouth and he was borne to the deck, and all so quietly that the second knew not what had happened till he was stretched beside the first, while the fellow in the boat hung on with a hook to the galley till he was pounced upon by six or seven of the merry crew and hoisted aboard, and, this being done, the new boat's load pulled off for the barque, the crew of which, too late, began to realise the trap into which they had fallen.

Before she could be put about and make off, the boat was up on her and the rogues had scrambled aboard, caring nothing for the blows dealt them, though one fell back into the bows badly hurt, to judge from his limpness. Ere long the two craft were side by side, and the prisoners, with their arms bound behind them, were gathered in the waist. They were a sturdy-looking set with sun-browned, honest faces and fair hair all save one, a fat and heavy-cheeked man who was unlike the rest, and whom I found to be a Dutchman that had taken passage in the barque, which was bound for Saint David's Haven in the Firth.

They seemed cast down, as was no wonder, at the loss of their vessel, and the Dutchman wept like a child. The others stood quietly, and watched the crew of the galley shift what was of value in the cargo, and there was little of it, being chiefly hides and timber, into the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*; but one of them, whom I took to be their skipper, gave a kind of sob as he saw the villains go aboard his craft with the carpenter's tools. I wondered what they were about to do, but was not left long in doubt, for after they had returned we cast off from the barque and sailed a little way apart, and then I saw that they had scuttled her and that she was settling down. In a short time she gave a lurch and a heave, her bow went down and her stern up, and she sank slowly into the waste of waters, leaving not a trace behind her.

A boy, who was one of the crew of six, wept aloud as he saw the ship go down, but was silenced by a rough cuff upon the head, and, by the glare of fury the poor skipper gave the brute who did it, I judged he was father to the boy.

Now, if this was bad, worse was to follow, and I saw the Norsemen gaze at each other with fear-stricken faces, as, at an order from Bartelow, some of the crew of the *Wisp* pushed out a long plank over the bulwarks and began to make it fast. As for the Dutchman, when he saw this he howled and tore his hair, and ceased only when he was struck upon the face.

'Gently, my lads, gently,' squeaked Bartelow, with an ugly smirk upon his fat visage, 'have it in order, so ho! Is it straight think you, Antonio? for a straight line is such that any part of it, howe'er, it may be placed, and so on, as Euclid hath it; that will do. A pretty lot they are to dance upon't, but I trust our friend o' the paunch is not over heavy, yet it looks a good plank, captain, doth it not?'

'Twould bear even you, methinks,' said Dysart.

'Then,' said Bartelow, 'let number one peradventure, and if need be a prick will be of service, as you know, Antonio.'

Antonio, a swarthy man, with a devil's face and a yellow tooth that hung out over his under lip, grinned, and tapped a knife in his belt.

'You are not about to drown these men,' said I in horror to the captain.

For answer, he smiled and nodded towards Bartelow.

'I have naught to do with it,' said he. 'Our worthy navigator steers all craft.'

I felt sick and giddy at these cruel words, and clenched my fists till my nails all but entered my palms, yet I could do nothing, and there was that in the scene which held me as if glued to the deck.

'Dead men tell no tales,' said Bartelow. 'Is number one ready, Antonio? A pleasant walk, sir, though but a short one; you will float again in some six weeks,' and I saw one of the Norsemen pushed forwards upon the plank. Then I shut my eyes and heard nothing more till there was a splash and a hoarse laugh from the crew. And so with my eyes closed I heard four such splashes, and then there was the sound of a scuffle and oaths and yells. I looked to see what had happened, and found the Norse skipper, who had wriggled one of his hands free, dealing fearful blows at the crowd of villains who had hold of his boy. Antonio was lying in the waist, his mouth a jelly of blood and froth, and

another of the crew lay across him. At the sight the fighting blood came upon me, and with a shout I drew my rapier and would have run to his help had not Simon Grisel gripped me from behind. The next moment the poor Norseman snatched up his son and leapt overboard with him, leaving the crew of the *Wisp* to curse and fume and wreak their vengeance on the Dutchman, who alone was left. I would have saved him if I could, for it was pitiful to hear his outcry, but Simon held me fast, and asked me if I was minded to lose my life for naught; and seeing his wisdom I kept quiet. The Dutchman, who had been kneeling shrieking for mercy with a face of agony, suddenly grew quiet and rose to his feet, then rushing at Bartelow he dealt that worthy a fearful kick upon the paunch, which caused him to bend double, and seizing one of the crew dragged him to the side, and together they vanished over the bulwarks, nor were they seen again.

Then, ere I knew, it I was raving and cursing like one possessed. I broke from Simon's grasp and ran at the captain in a fury, but he stepped back, and putting out his foot I stumbled over it and fell, and before I could rise I was seized by four of the villains and bound fast.

'It is no good, lad, you see,' said Dysart, with a short laugh; 'we must even let Phil have his way, though, by Saint Christopher! he has had rather a dose o't this time; he is squeaking there like a stuck hog.' Then, pointing to me—'Take him below,' he added to the men who had bound me, 'and set a guard over him.'

After being unbound and shut into the little cabin, I had time to think over the fearful deed I had witnessed, and found some consolation in recalling the kick the poor Dutchman had bestowed upon Phil Bartelow, who, I could see, was at the bottom of this cruelty, for Dysart, as the Scripture has it, seemed to care for none of these things.

I sat on my narrow bunk and wondered what would be my fate, but no one came near me, and ere long I knew by the motion that we were under way again, and presently I fell asleep, but was wakened by one of the crew bringing me a half loaf of bread and a jug of ale, so that I saw I was not to be badly treated. As I was eating I noted the bulkhead

move in one part, and to my surprise a hole appeared in it which grew larger, a portion of the partition sliding back, and through this gap came first the head and then the rest of Simon Grisel. As soon as he was fairly in the cabin he put his fingers to his mouth to keep me silent, then said in a whisper,—

‘Well, lad, did I speak truth?’

‘That you did,’ said I, whispering also; ‘they are more devils than men.’

‘Art not far wrong, lad,’ said he, ‘though some be worse than others; but you should have done as I told you, and kept quiet.’

‘God knows,’ said I, ‘that I could not help it.’

‘I do not wonder at it,’ he answered; ‘but look you, this is a passage by way of a secret storeroom, known only to the captain and Bartelow, and, as you see, one other, though they are ignorant of my knowledge of it. On the other side it opens by a sliding panel, like the one here, on to the waist in the forepart of the poop, and when the time comes you can escape by it in this fashion,’ and he showed me the way of reaching the secret spring. ‘The other is the same,’ said he, ‘so you cannot fail.’

‘But,’ said I, ‘when will the chance fall to me?’

‘Listen,’ he said. ‘I am a spy aboard this pirate craft, sent from an English ship of war, which, decked out like a merchantman, is to lie off the Humber two days hence. I have told these villains that she is a craft richly laden and easy to be taken, and they have fallen into my trap as these poor devils of Norsemen fell into theirs, and we are even now shaping a course for the Yorkshire coast. Now, when we are under her guns you can creep out, and when the galley is taken my word will set you free, and hang every mother’s son among these villains.’

‘It is a mighty pretty plot,’ said I, ‘an’ only it will work as it is wanted.’

‘Leave that to old Simon,’ said Grisel; ‘he has had many a worse job. But I must away now, for it is not easy to get out into the waist, and I can only come and go when it is dark and when Bogstone, the boatswain, is in charge, and the captain and Bartelow below. Farewell, my lad, and keep your heart up,’ and with a friendly grip of my hand, this

worthy fellow crawled out again and the panel slipped into its place. I saw no one but Dysart and my jailer for two days after this, and the former came merely to make sport of me, but on the third day Grisel came again. 'Beshrew me,' he said, 'I came near being seen, for I am over long to creep in and out of holes, but the upper sails of a tall ship are in sight, and I am of opinion it is the *Deerhound*, so when you hear the sound of cannon you can creep out, for they will be kept busy enough, please God! to have no time for watching you,' and after waiting a little longer he went away once more.

Very eagerly I waited for the roar of the great guns as I sat and listened to the tread of feet and the roll of shot on the poop deck above me. It seemed as if the time would never pass, and I could see nothing from the port, there being a thick haze over the sea. At the same time I could tell it had fallen calm, and presently I heard the sound of the sweeps and knew they were rowing the galley, while the creak, creak of the oars in the side-holes came faintly to my ears. All at once the haze lifted and I could see the hull of a great three-masted ship not far from us, but the mist hung about her and hid her upper spars and rigging.

We were drawing closer to her, I noticed, and she seemed never to see us, but kept slowly on her course, for there was but a breath of wind. I heard a hail from the deck above, and someone called out from the big ship, but what he said I could not catch, and we kept getting closer.

Then, as if by magic, I saw a row of ports fly open and the mouths of eight cannon grinning at us, and then there was a burst of flame and an ear-splitting crash, while from the galley came the thud of the shot as it struck, and shrieks and yells and orders shouted out wildly as I could hear.

I waited not a moment more, but slipped out of the cabin in the way Simon had shown me, and found myself in a dark room filled for the most part with sacks and barrels. Going straight across it I found the other spring after a short search, and all unnoticed crept out into the waist and crouched beneath a bench.

Good luck! I had never before been in such a plight, for round shot went flying over my head with a humming sound, and I saw that the foremast had been cut away some six

feet above the deck. There were none but dead and dying men in the waist, and there were not a few of these, for they had been working at the sweeps when the first broadside swept aboard. The wounded were lying in pools of dark blood, groaning and crying out for water, and from the decks came the roar of the galley's guns and the cheering of her crew. And here again I had cause to thank God I had not grown in height, for a chain shot all but took my head off as it was when I climbed upon the bench to get a better view.

Before I jumped down, howbeit, I saw we were lying near the big ship, which seemed crowded with men, and I could note that the galley's guns had done her some damage, for her bowsprit had been shot away and there was many a white streak upon her hull. I could see the men on the foredeck of the galley begrimed with powder smoke and stripped to their waists, working at the cannon like demons, and noted that they had run all the guns to the one side ; and every now and then I saw a shot pitch amongst them and plough a bloody lane through them, and one of these same shots struck a cannon and put it out of use, besides killing or wounding all who were near to it.

I saw nothing of Simon Grisel, but it seemed to me this fight would never last long, for it looked as if we should be sunk by the heavy fire ; but I might have noted, had I been skilled in such matters, that the shot from the Queen's ship flew high and passed over us, for the most part, doing little damage to our hull. The crew of the galley seemed to be making a good fight of it, and I heard the captain's voice call on them to quicken their fire and double-shot the guns. As I climbed again upon the bench to see how the big ship was faring, a man's body came pitching over from the poop and landed in front of me in the waist, and looking at it I saw it was Bartelow, who had been struck on the body by a cannon ball, and now lay a ghastly heap drumming with his heels upon the planking, for he was not quite dead. I sickened at the sight, though I felt that he had met the doom he well deserved, albeit it was a pity he could not have been hanged, as many a better man has been.

One of the big ship's masts had been shot away by this time, and two of her guns had been silenced, but yet I felt

it well to duck my head, for the shot was still flying thick above me. Nevertheless, I began to feel a doubt as to how this fearful fight should end, for the galley's crew still cheered lustily and kept working at their guns, while there was no one to tell me how the battle went.

All at once, however, there was a thud upon the galley's side, and then she seemed to tremble and shake in every plank, while there came a roar as if the world were ending. A blinding flash followed, a spreading sheet of flame leaped upwards from the forepart of the waist, and a smell of sulphur filled the air. I felt myself hurled upwards, grasping at nothing and whirling round and round, and then falling, now head first, now feet first, till with a souse I went down into the sea and again felt myself rising ; but as I reached the surface and gasped for breath something came crack upon my head. I threw out my arms and seized a floating plank, and then the light danced before my eyes, there was a singing of waters in my ears, and all was black.

CHAPTER XII

OF THE 'GOLDEN DRAGON' AND THE SENTENCE OF DEATH

WHEN the light came back to my eyes and my senses returned to me, I could feel that I lay upon my back, and I heard the sound of voices around me. It seemed a long time, howbeit, ere I ventured to turn myself to see where I might be, and as I did so I heard a voice exclaim,—

'The dog is coming round at last, we shall have one hanging, thank the Lord!'

I wondered, in a dull way, what this pious wish might mean, and as through a blood-stained mist I saw a group of men standing round me, while I found that I lay upon planking, and I felt as if my scalp had grown upwards and become overtight. Then with a splash some water was poured upon my head and neck, and this was done thrice, till the haze passed from before my eyes and I could see more clearly. This being so, I made out that I was upon a ship's deck; and my memory beginning to unfold, I judged that this must be the Queen's ship and the men her crew, and I wondered what had happened to the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*. So much did I wonder that presently I asked, and received for part answer a kick upon the ribs, and someone in a gruff tone said,—

'The cursed rover has been blown out of the water and all her crew with her.'

'I call to mind,' said I, faintly, 'that I went upwards.'

'Verily,' said the same voice, 'and you shall go up again ere long, but with somewhat to keep you up as well;' and at this there was a loud laugh, and again a murmur of voices. Presently, feeling better, I sat up and found the tightness of my scalp caused by a lump upon it larger than

the largest turkey's egg. Then I remembered all, and the crack upon my skull, and knew that Simon Grisel's plot had not failed, but had rather over-reached the mark.

'Get up, you ape,' said someone, and kicked me again in the ribs ; but this time I caught the foot which kicked me, and rose quickly to my feet, and a young man in gay attire, but much begrimed with smoke and powder, went backwards on his head upon the deck. He was up in a moment again, and would have run me through with a sword he held in his hand, had not an old man with a pointed beard pushed him aside and said to him, in a stern voice,—

'Cease this folly, Edward ; it serves ye right for striking, or, as I should say, kicking a man who is down, be he pirate or not.'

Now, seeing that these good men were about to fall into a grievous error, I thought it well to put them right.

'I am no pirate,' I said, 'as Simon Grisel can tell you.'

'Then how came ye to be in this craft?' asked the old man, who I saw was in command.

Thereupon I told him my story, dealing only with the death of the Frenchman and the manner of my joining the galley.

'A likely tale,' said he, 'a most proper story ; but we have only your word for the same.'

'If you but ask Simon Grisel,' said I, 'you will find whether or no I tell truth.'

'And who may Simon Grisel be?' he asked, while those around laughed at my bewildered look.

'The spy,' said I, 'the English spy who led the galley under your guns.'

The captain shook his head.

'I fear,' said he, 'the blow has turned your head. We know of no spy, and had not heard the craft was hereabouts till the sound of her sweeps reached us.'

At this a great fear arose in my mind.

'What is this ship called?' I asked in haste.

'The *Golden Dragon*,' he answered.

'Not the *Deerhound*?'

'Nay, but there is a ship of that name hailing from Plymouth.'

'Ah,' said I, 'that explains all ; it was the *Deerhound* should have taken us.'

'Pardon me,' he answered, 'but I cannot agree with you upon that point;' and the crew laughed again.

'But,' said I, 'Simon Grisel is not lost, is he?'

'You are the only one of the villains saved,' said the old man, 'and in spite of your pretty story you shall swing for it. Twenty and two good men have I lost, to say nothing of the bowsprit. Take him below,' he added, 'and have the irons put on him.'

'But, sir,' I pleaded, for I saw it was like to go hard with me.

He waved his hand and I was hurried below, while I heard the group laugh and someone said,—

'Clever rogue, but a strange build even for a sea-rover; and then, as my head passed below the level of the hatch combing, I heard no more. The men who had seized me fastened my wrists together with manacles, and pushed me into a dark, evil-smelling hole down in the bowels of this great ship, and as they opened the door I could hear a scampering of rats across the planking, and my heart sank at the thought of being left in this vile place.

'Shall I be kept here long?' I asked one of the men.

'Only till you be hung,' said he, with a grin.

'And when may that be?'

'On the morrow, I fancy. Captain Ambrose never keeps one over long, and he is a trifle savage, for these devils gave us no small trouble, and all for naught. So, little man, you had best to prayers.'

'God help me,' I muttered.

'He will have hard work, then,' said the man, and the others gurgled with joy at this sorry jest, and then, making the door fast, left me in darkness, after setting a loaf of bread and some water beside me on the flooring. I strode about this dark hole of a place for fully two hours, sick at heart and in a mortal fright, for I had seen little of death, and was scarce a man in years yet.

I thought of all that had happened since I turned my back on Kirkcaldy, and marvelled at my ill-luck. I had starved and gained a mighty secret, which I had made but poor use of, to save my neck. I had plotted, and fled, and fallen amongst thieves, and now here I was to be hanged on the morrow if the man spoke truth, and yet I had done no

crime, nor had aught with which to blame myself. Truly, I had seen and come through more in these few weeks than I had ever hoped to do in all my life, and now it seemed as if there was to be an ending of me altogether. It was no wonder these Englishmen did not believe my tale, and I felt nervous and dispirited, for my good sword, which despite all I had stuck to, had been taken from me, together with dag and dagger.

At last my head pained me so much that I lay down and strove to sleep; but my brain was busy, and I could do nothing save sit and think moodily upon my fate, although I did not give up all hope, but trusted for the best. After some time had gone past in this fashion, the door was opened again by one of the men who had bound me, and in gruff tones he bade me rise and follow him, as Captain Ambrose would speak with me. As we left the cell, for it was nothing better, two men with hangers closed in behind us and followed as a guard. Without a word we went along a dark passage, then across an open space, from which steps mounted to the deck, and at length I found myself in a roomy cabin, with lockers running round it, and a pleasant window through which one could mark the heave of the billows as they chased the ship, for a wind had sprung up again and we were under way. At a table sat Captain Ambrose, and by his side was the young man who had kicked me on the ribs, and whom I had upset. Behind them stood a short, thick-set man with a brown beard and a ruddy face, who was talking quickly and laughing as I entered. I was set in front of this trio, and my guard stood behind me ready to cut me down if I tried to play any tricks; but had they felt how the irons were cutting into my flesh they might have rested easy in their minds.

'Well, sir' said the captain, as I stared at him fixedly, 'do you now confess to having lied to us?'

'By no means,' said I.

'Remember, sirrah,' he said sternly, 'that to speak the truth is your one chance of life.'

'Then am I making the most of it,' I answered.

'Kick the dog, Gresham,' said the young man to one of the men who guarded me; 'twill teach him to be less clever with his tongue, I warrant.'

'I opine,' said I, 'you do not care to do the deed yourself.'

At this he flushed hotly, but the captain bade him hold his peace, while the man behind grinned and gave me a nod, as if by no means ill pleased at my answer to this puppy.

'Now, sirrah,' said the captain, 'what was the name of the craft we sunk?'

'The *Will-o'-the-Wisp*,' I answered.

'Hailing from?'

'The port of Leith.'

'Her captain's name?'

'Hew Dysart.'

'By my faith,' said he, 'so we have made an end of this fellow. It is a good riddance, though I would we had him here to hang with you.'

'There is no reason for my hanging,' I answered stoutly.

'You will permit me to judge of that,' he replied, tapping on the table.

'Very good,' said I; 'but methinks a man should have some say in the disposal of his neck.'

'You are a cool fellow,' he answered, looking not ill-pleased, while the man behind him grinned more than ever.

'I am far from cool,' said I; 'tis but my manner of speech.'

'And a cursedly poor manner, too,' interposed the youth, who was now lounging at full length upon the locker.

'Nevertheless,' said I, 'tis a trifle more courteous than yours, sir.'

'This to me,' he roared, springing to his feet.

'Begone, sir, and at once,' said Captain Ambrose, pointing to the door.

'But, uncle—'

'Dost hear me, sirrah?'

'The young man rose and slunk out like a beaten cur darting a look of hatred at me as he passed.

'You are a bold man as well as a short one,' said the captain to me as the door closed.

'I am no bolder than any other,' I answered, 'but I am here on a false charge, and speak with you as upon equal terms.'

'Your name?' said he.

'Jeremy Clephane.'

'A Scotchman, by your tongue?'

'Even so.'

'A Catholic?'

'God forbid!'

At this they both laughed, and I could hear the guard sniggering.

'Master Rogers,' said the old captain to the man who stood behind him, 'be pleased to take this fellow's story down in writing, it may be needful.'

So once more I had to tell my tale, even down to the capture of the Norse barque and the secret storeroom, and when I had finished I was ordered under guard again, and the captain told me he would have me dealt with when we reached port; and so, having thanked him for his clemency, I was led out of his presence a trifle less downhearted than when I entered. I was not sorry to find that I was not to be lodged in the rat-haunted hole again, albeit it made little difference to me, for whether it was from the blow upon my head, the horror of the fight, or the fear of hanging, I know not, but that very night I fell into a stupor, lying but half conscious and mighty short in the temper, and so I continued till, seeing I was like to die, Captain Ambrose sent the surgeon to me, and he bled me and swore at me till for very fear of him I showed signs of life, although I was not upon my feet again till the *Golden Dragon* cast anchor off Portsmouth, a seaport in the Channel.

As we came to an anchorage I could hear great booming of guns and cheering, and all that day there seemed to be much coming and going between the ship and the shore; but it was not till the day following that, the irons having been replaced on my wrists, I was led upon deck to be hanged, for all that I knew. Howbeit, I was not come to such straits yet, for when I began to see about me, my eyes having been blinded by the darkness in which I had lain, I perceived a group of men most elegantly dressed, with cloaks lined with fur, reaching to their knees. They bore an air of much dignity and importance, and, as I live, some of their paunches would have put even Bartelow's to shame.

Behind them were a dozen pikemen with steel caps and back and breast pieces of armour, and as I was led forwards, a trumpeter sounded and a man called out for silence; and then Master Rogers, stepping forward, read over a paper whereby I was confided to the safe keeping of the most worshipful magis-

trates and council of the royal burgh of Portsmouth, and when he had made an end of this, the trumpeter sounded again and the pikemen formed a guard around me, and being tall, they shut me out of sight of everything, though I had seen that this Portsmouth was a big place and most prettily situate, also that there were many craft at anchor, and by the wharves, some gun ships, others simple traders, and then, as I have said, the pikemen closed around me and shut out my view.

I was lowered into a boat and rowed ashore to a landing-place of stone, and thereafter I was marched through the streets to what I took to be a prison. Nor was I wrong.

Now all the way, though I could see but little, yet I marvelled at the noise and bustle, and I learned afterwards that a great crowd had lined the streets, for the news of the capturing of a villainous pirate ship of Scotland, which had wrought much damage, had been noised abroad, and the people had come out to see the rover who had been taken. I chuckle yet to think that they must have been mightily put out at seeing nothing, for only those at the windows could catch a glimpse of me, and that of not much more than the lump upon my head.

When we reached the prison, of which I made out nothing save the tops of two towers, there was a halt for a time, and then a great gate swung open and a portcullis was raised in front of us. We tramped across the flagstones, and so entered a courtyard, where we halted, and finally a guard of four pikemen led me to a small door, and then up a winding stair and along a narrow vaulted passage, till we reached another door studded with iron. This was thrown open and I was pushed down a flight of three steps, and tripping, fell upon my face and was sorely bruised, and then, ere I could rise, the door clanged to behind me and I was alone.

I found that I was in a vaulted chamber of stone, some eight feet high in the centre and with but one entrance for air and light, a small hole in the outer wall, across which ran thick iron bars both crosswise and lengthwise.

The place was bare, but clean and dry, and a trifle better than even my last prison on board the *Golden Dragon*. There seemed but little chance of escaping from it howbeit, for when I pulled myself up to the little opening and looked

out, there was naught visible but a blank wall about twenty yards away, and I could tell that I was some distance above the ground as the tinkle of a coin came faintly to my ears, and that only after a time. It was the last coin I had, for I had been searched and everything else taken from me by a jailor, who had rifled me ere I was pushed into the cell—why he left me even this one I know not, save that it was not of his clemency, for he had kicked me when he made an end of searching.

After a time some food was given me by this same jailor, but the surly fellow would not answer me when I spoke to him, and after I had eaten I grew sick for the first time in my life, and lay the rest of that day upon my back, wishing I might die and have done with it, for I hated the sight of these walls, and felt as a caged bird must when deprived of liberty and God's sunshine. I fell asleep at last, and did not waken till the jailor shook me roughly by the shoulder and bade me rise and break my fast. After I had done, and truly there was not much to finish, he beckoned me to follow him, and outside the door I found the pikemen awaiting me again, and so was marched out of the prison and through the town to a building where I was to be tried, as one of my guards told me. Again I marvelled at the interest the folks here had in me, for so dense was the throng that horsemen had to clear the way; but the pikemen told me that many of the men slain on the *Golden Dragon* had hailed from Portsmouth, and that there would be a riot were I not hung.

I found little comfort in this piece of news, but had small time to think upon it, for we were shortly at the courthouse, and after much pushing and jostling I found myself, with a pikeman on either side of me, in a little box like place, and I stood and gazed around the great room, which was packed full of people who feasted their eyes on me, and talked without ceasing, till a voice cried for silence, and an old man, with a fat and sleepy face, who sat apart from the rest and above two others on a raised seat, asked me my name.

Now, I knew full well that these people longed to see me hanged, and moreover, that the judge knew from the paper of Master Rogers all concerning me, or, at anyrate, would very soon know, therefore I was resolved to say nothing, and held my peace.

'Dost hear me?' cried the old man, and one of the pikemen jogged me on the side.

I stared at him and answered nothing.

The people laughed, and he grew red in the face with anger.

'Strike him on the mouth,' he cried, and one of the pikemen would have done so, but that there was a protest against it, and so I was left alone. Then I heard Master Roger's paper read aloud, and some gave witness as to the sinking of the galley and as to how I was picked up by a boat from the Queen's ship, and amongst them was the nephew of Captain Ambrose, who would fain have lied about me, I make no doubt, and there seemed no one in my favour save Master Rogers, whose kindly face bade me take courage. Then others spoke as to craft sunk and burned by the *Will-o-the-Wisp*, and I was asked many questions, but answered naught, for I could see no good come from it, and feared harm might arise if by any chance they should learn of the Papish plot.

At last, after the old judge had spoken much as to the vileness of the pirates and the latter end of the wicked, of the bravery of the men of the Queen's ship and the judgment of the Lord, twelve burghers, who were the jury, left the room, and the buzz of talk and laughter continued without ceasing till they entered again, while I thought upon my father and Mistress Marjorie, and longed to have my hands free.

Scarce five minutes had gone ere the burghers filed in again and took their places, and silence fell once more upon the court.

For a time I heard nothing until a voice said loudly,—

'Do ye find the prisoner guilty or not guilty?'

'Guilty, your worship.'

'And worthy of?'

'Death, your worship.'

'Hast anything to say, prisoner?'

At this, seeing the sneering face of Captain Ambrose's nephew across the courthouse, I answered, nodding at him,—

'Only this, that I would to God I had yonder puppy for but three minutes at the end of my rapier, that I might

teach him the wrist stroke of De Cusac, and what comes after it.'

The crowd gaped in wonder, and some laughed, but silence was again called for, and the fat judge rose and said,—

'Jeremy Clephane, murderer, pirate, and consorter with sinners, thou hast been found guilty of the crime of piracy and robbery upon the high seas, and therefore do I sentence thee to death, and the manner of it shall be in this wise. Three days hence thou shalt be taken from the place where now thou liest to the place known as the Market Square, and there thou shalt be hanged by the neck till thou art dead, and thereafter thy head shall be struck off, and set up over the sea-gate, and thy body drawn and quartered, and the parts thereof set above the other gates; and may God have mercy upon thy soul.'

Then there was a cry from the herald of 'God save Queen Bess,' the judges said 'Amen' and bowed their heads, and I was led away while the crowd cheered both inside and on the streets, and I felt that the toils had closed around me.

CHAPTER XIII

OF WHAT I HEARD IN THE CHIMNEY, AND THE MAN IN THE ARCHWAY

ONCE more I lay on the floor of the cell, and for a time could do naught but think over the strange lot which had befallen me, and recall the greedy look on the faces of the crowd, albeit they had seemed pleased when they learned how I had slain De Papillon. I thought upon the fat face of the judge and the way he had smiled as he passed sentence on me, and then I thought of what would happen three days hence; but as I thought upon it I became resolved that I would cheat the hangman and baulk the folk of Portsmouth of their prey.

To this intent I began to try and find a way of escape. I had no hope from the window, nor, as I soon saw, could I get free by the door. There remained therefore the floor, the roof and the walls. The floor was of flagstones well laid and impassable, unless, indeed, one had a pickaxe wherewith to break it up, and I had not even a toothpick.

The roof I could not reach, even by standing on the stool which was the sole ornament of the cell. As a last measure, I looked to the walls, which were of squared stones filled with cement, but somewhat loosely, so that there were crevices and gaps between them in some places.

With the stool I drummed upon them, holding it behind my back, and at one place, to my joy, the wall gave out a hollow sound. Beyond a doubt there was some cavity behind, and it reached to near the floor, as I could tell by lying down and beating upon it with my heels. Nor was this all, for as I looked at the place from across the cell, I marked that the stones at this part were not like those of the

other parts, and that they had been built in the form of a half circle, and at a more recent date, at least, so it seemed.

I longed to have my hands free, but the jailor did not even loosen them at meal times, and as this could not be, at least not then, I had even to do without. That very day, however, seeing that each leg of the stool was tipped with iron, I managed, by standing on it, bending backwards, and then straightening myself, to wrench one of these same legs from its socket, although, when the jailor entered with my supper, I had much ado to get it back in time. After he had gone, and with him what I had left over from the meal, I set to work upon one of the stones, and all that night I picked and better picked around it with the stool leg, till towards morning it was so loosened that I could lever it out a little and run the chain of my wristlets up and down against its sharp, uneven edge. I had to stop often, for my arms cramped, and the work was hard, but ere the jailor entered I had replaced the stone and the mortar, and sat with my back against the place, looking, I fondly hoped, as if I had slept all night and was still drowsy. However that may be, he said nothing, and as soon as I was alone I set to work again, and in four hours' time or thereabouts my chain was worn asunder, and I could work more quickly. I feared greatly lest the jailor should come in at odd times, and catch me at the work, but he was a dull as well as a surly fellow, and paid his visits as regularly as do the watch in the High Street of Edinburgh.

Late in the day I got the stone out and found an opening behind it, which seemed to run upwards, but of its nature I had no idea till, on thrusting in the stool leg and withdrawing it, I found its far end, which had touched something coated with soot, and then judged that I had uncovered an old fireplace, and praying God that the chimney was a wide one, I set to work upon the next stone.

I had need of great care now, for there was much mortar to replace besides the stone, and I had also to set myself against the wall with my hands behind me whenever the man entered. Howbeit, though I once came near being discovered, he paid his last visit without suspecting aught, and all that night I worked away, taking but an hour's sleep

in the early morning, till at last I had four stones loose and the opening was large enough for me to crawl through.

I was resolved to make no attempt at escape till the evening, as this would give me a longer time to get away, whither I knew not, and very slowly the day passed, but at length the light from the little window began to grow faint and the cell gloomy, and I wondered if it was to be my last night on earth ; and then I put away these gruesome thoughts and shook myself. '*Ma foi,*' I muttered, 'not if Jeremy the Squat know it, and the chimney be wide,' and with that I took out the stones and slipped into the fireplace, after carefully fixing the leg into the stool again and gathering up the mortar.

I soon found the chimney was wide, and yet not too wide, for by way of a trial I wriggled myself up it a little, and then descending, I put the stones in place and pushed the mortar between them, till I flattered myself it would take some time to find by lantern light whither I had gone, and then I heard the door of the cell open and the hoarse voice of the jailor cried out,—

'Here comes a parson to help you hang on the morrow.'

'Tis very dark,' said another voice.

'I will fetch the lantern,' said the jailor, 'but have a care of the steps, good sir.'

After that I waited to hear no more, but, as silently as I could, commenced my climb up the chimney. '*Mon Dieu !*' as De Cusac would have said, was ever such a game for knee and elbow skinning as this same chimney climbing ? I was raw ere I had mounted up eight feet, and was half-choked with dust and soot ; but still I struggled on, making little noise, but slipping and scrambling in my hurry, and then, why then, I came to a dead stop, for the chimney from the cell opened into another shaft, and this new chimney narrowed some way above the junction, so that I could not worm my way up it.

I paused a moment, wondering what I should do next, but my doubts were solved all at once, for my arms slipped and I went sprawling downwards in the new chimney, falling full twenty feet ere I could stop myself. Stop myself I did at last, however, though with much pain and loss of skin ; and then I turned cold, for I could hear the sound of men's voices,

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and feared that my legs might betray me. What I heard soon made me easy on that score, and instead sent the blood tingling through me and made my fingers itch as they had done when De Papillon kicked the landlord, for in one of the speakers I recognised the young blade who had kicked and befooled me as I lay helpless on the deck of the Queen's ship.

'Please the Lord,' said I to myself, 'an' I cannot show him the old wrist stroke, yet I will give him something whereby he may remember me ;' and then I slipped down a little further and heard what they were saying.

'I will wager you a cup of sac, Ned Saltcombe, that there is naught in the chimney,' said a drunken voice.

'Go for't then.'

'But wherefore ?'

'There is soot in it, fool, ah ! ah !'

'Fairly won, Ned, fairly won, wert ever a wit ; but I must go find the pass-word else you must needs stay here all night, and old Bottlenose would have somewhat to say to that, eh, Ned ?'

'D— old Bottlenose, say I.'

'Am with you, lad, though he be your uncle, but finish the Burgundy while I am away, and I will crack your skull for you,' and I heard the voice, carolling a drunken ditty, growing faint and dying away.

'Jeremy,' said I to myself, 'the Lord has delivered this drunken knave into your hands, see to it,' and forthwith I dropped downwards as softly as might be. Very quietly, when I reached the hearth-stone, I felt with my feet to see if there were any bars, and finding none, I slipped down on my knees and backed out into the room. Rising to my feet I gave a glance around and saw a table littered with bottles and glasses, and beyond it an open door, while sitting with his back to me was a man pouring out a glass of wine, as I could tell by its gurgle in the glass. In a moment I was behind him, and hearing my breathing, he turned and saw me. He said not a word, but gazed at me for a moment in speechless horror, with staring eyes and ashen face. The next, he opened his mouth to scream aloud, and the next I had him by the throat and was repaying the kick upon my ribs. I squeezed his weasand till his face grew black and the

whites of his eyes red, and then, despite his wriggings and writhings, which soon ceased, I unwound a kerchief from his neck and crammed it into his mouth. Finally, I rolled him off his chair and fastened the gag by my belt, and then my eyes fell upon his rapier, and by the cross handle with the serpent's head upon it I knew it for mine own, and with joy I took it from him, belt and all, and buckled it on, feeling fit for whatever might come to pass, and even chuckling as I heard a footstep drawing near. In a moment I blew out the lamp and the room was in darkness, then I crouched behind the door and waited.

'Halloa, Ned,' shouted a voice, 'what the devil dost think the pass-word is? Neither more nor less than Will-o'-the-Wisp, after that bloody pirate craft old Bottlenose sent to Satan, and of which he is so proud. But what the mischief hast done with the light?'

The man was at the door now, and I held my breath as he passed through it and began fumbling with his flint and steel, cursing the while with many curious oaths which were new to me. Leaving him thus, and shrouded in the gagged man's cloak, which had been lying across a chair, I slipped out and found myself in a passage lit from the roof by a single lamp.

I crept along it and down a flight of stairs, then followed another passage which ran to the left, and found myself at last before a small door. It opened easily, and passing through it, I was in the great courtyard of the prison. Leaving the door open on purpose, I kept in the shadow of the wall and looked around me. It was raining heavily, and the night was a dark one, for which I thanked God and took fresh courage, and then, still keeping in the gloom, I made my way along the wall, and rounding a corner, continued along an arched passage, which ended at a small gate where was a guardhouse.

I was soon close to it, and crouched deep in the shadow, resolved to kill the guard if need be, but trusting that the uproar in the prison, which must of certainty arise when my escape and the gagged man were discovered, might give me a chance to get through the gate. I had not long to wait ere there were cries for help, and then shouts, and from where I lay I could see the flash of lanterns as the guard

from the great gate hurried to the tower whence came the cries. At the same moment a man pushed open the door of the small guardhouse, and stood listening to the uproar. So close was he that I could hear his breathing, but as I half drew my sword to make an end of him, the shouts grew louder, and disappearing for a brief space, he returned with a lantern and ran past me in great haste. I darted out of the shadow and into the guardroom, but stopped short, for as I entered a man came out of an inner room and stood staring at me with a vacant look. By this, as by his bowed figure, hanging under-lip and slavering mouth, I saw he was a natural, and, may God forgive me, was thankful for it. 'Quick man,' I said, 'where is the key? I must for help.'

'Bee'st thou the devil,' said he, craning his neck at me.

Now, when I called to mind that my face must be blackened with soot and my clothes torn, to say nothing of my squatness, and the fetters on my wrists, this was no unlikely idea to come into his poor head.

'Even so,' I answered, 'an' I shall take you with me an' you do not give me the gate key.'

'Good old devil,' said he, smiling to himself and slavering the while.

'The key,' said I, 'or—'

'Devil or no devil,' said he 'shalt not have key, unless dost give the word, for so Bill bade me say.'

'The word,' said I, wonderingly.

'Ay, the word.'

At this a light broke upon me.

'Will-o'-the-Wisp it is,' said I.

'Good old devil,' said he again, and taking the key from a shelf, went out and opened the gate for me. In a moment I had him by the neck and jerked him backwards, then dragging the key from the lock I passed through the gateway; but ere I could pull it to, he was on me, spitting like a cat and scratching like a half-dozen, trying to tear at my throat with his long fingers. Happily for me he did not cry out, and indeed it was a good thing for himself also, as otherwise I would of necessity have had to run him through; as it was, after flinging him off me a second time, I stooped, and taking him round the knees I pitched him bodily through the gateway and then closed and locked

the gate, and for a moment stood quietly getting back my breath, for I was spent after all I had gone through.

I was free of the gloomy prison, and could have thrown up my hat for joy if I had had one; having none, I threw up my heels instead, and ran at the best of my pace down one street and up another, till the cry of the night-watch made me pull up and take to wondering what my next step was to be. I had still to get over the town wall or through one of the gates, and judged it would be no easy matter; for though by great good fortune I had learned the password for the prison, I knew not that for the town—unless, indeed, it was the same—and I dare risk nothing, while my strange build would easily betray me.

The streets were deserted, for though the night was young the rain was coming down in torrents, and despite Ned Saltcombe's cloak, I was becoming soaked and sodden. It struck me that, do what I might, the sooner I was out of the town the better; and so I started off, following my nose for want of a better guide, and quickened my pace as I heard shouts and cries from behind me in the direction of the prison. I had run down several streets, and was about to turn a corner, when the cry of the watch reached me.

'Eleven of the clock, and a dirty night.'

The watchman was not far off by the sound of him, and I slunk back into an archway, over which hung a single oil lamp, casting a faint light around it, but serving to make the arch as gloomy as the grave. I had not taken half-a-dozen steps into the dark, however, when I came violently against someone standing by the wall, and ere I could draw my sword or do aught by way of defence, I was thrown on my back with a couple of huge hands gripping my throat. I felt as the puppy I had half-strangled must have felt, but as the sound of the watchman's footsteps passed and grew faint, the grasp on my windpipe was loosed, and my captor dragged me out of the archway into the light of the lamp and knelt upon my chest.

'By the bones of the saints,' he growled, 'here is a black man, and the colour coming off him. Did ever anyone see the like?'

'You are mistaken, good sir,' I answered; 'I am a Christian like yourself.'

'Then you must needs be a good one,' he chuckled, 'for I am as holy as they make them, and my clothes holier still.'

Now I had reason to doubt the first of his statements, for he was an ugly-looking rogue, with a shock of coarse red hair and a beard to match; but it was easy, even by the lamp, to see that the second was no lie, for he was as sorry a scarecrow as one could see in an oatfield of Fife.

'Suffer me to rise,' I said, 'I shall not harm you.'

'Hark to that now! I thank you mightily, but will trouble you for this;' and so saying, he whipped off my sword belt and buckled it round his own bulky carcase, after which he searched my pockets, but finding nothing, rubbed his sleeve across my face and stared at me again. 'By the bones of the saints, if it be not the little pirate who is to hang on the morrow,' he cried.

'Even so,' said I, 'but by your help I hope to live a trifle longer.'

'Sdeath, but 'tis a game little cock, and 'twere a pity it should die too soon.'

'Then show me some place where I may hide,' I pleaded, for my head was swimming and I began to grow faint, while in the distance I could hear the shouts of the men searching for me, and feared the whole town would soon be roused.

'Softly, softly,' he said. 'What am I to have for putting my neck in the same noose with yours?'

'I have naught but my sword, and that you have taken.'

'And wisely, too, for I heard how you slew a certain Frenchman. But look you, I am in hiding also, so birds of a feather must flock together,' and with that he took his weight off my chest, and helped me to my feet. 'Follow me,' he whispered, and turned again into the archway which led into a lane that ran between two high walls, and after going down this a little way, he struck off to his right and took me through a maze of narrow streets, till finally he stopped at a low door, which he pushed open. 'Get down the stairs,' he said gruffly, 'and have a care of your head.'

Although I did not like the man's looks, I had nothing for it but to obey, and creeping down a steep ladder, I found myself in a filthy cellar lit by a couple of rush-lights. It was under the level of the ground, damp and filthy, but I cared

not one whit, and fairly worn out by want of sleep and excitement, I threw myself on a dirty pallet and lay like a log.

The red-haired man closed the door and came after me ; then he sat down and whistled a tune while he examined my rapier.

'Tis a goodly blade,' said he, 'and of foreign steel.'

'How do you know?' I asked him.

'Ah, ah, had you as much to do with swords as I, you would soon learn, but you had best to sleep, for I am off to see the sport. These fools have no chance of finding you, and will lose their rest for naught. But first, for fear that you might go amissing I must make you fast.'

He took a coil of rope and bound my arms to my sides, and then fastened my legs also, after which he rose and put on Ned Saltcombe's cloak over his tattered doublet.

'Surely,' said I, 'there is no need of this !'

'No need of binding you ?'

'Yes.'

'Why, you fool, wherefore dost think I brought you here.'

'To hide me.'

'Even so, but only till I can show these fools where you lie hidden. Why, man, 'tis worth fifty crowns and a pardon to me. Ta-ta, I shall see you anon, and sleep as well as may be ;' and with a leer the ruffian climbed the ladder and closed the door after him.

As I heard the key grate in the lock I turned on my side and wept for the first time since the death of De Cusac. It was no wonder, for I was but a lad, and my head was still weak with the blow ; and above all, when I thought I was safe and had found a friend, if a rough one, I had all the time been drawing nearer to the gibbet which waited for me in the market square. Despite it all, and despite the pain of my bare knees and elbows, I was so tired out that I fell into a fitful sleep, waking with starts and dozing off again, till I was roused for good by a rude kick, and looking up found the ruffian who had trapped me, and with him four pikemen, while I could see the faces of others as they peered down at me from the door.

'Tis the little devil himself,' said one. 'By my head, he has led us a pretty chase.'

'Poor wretch,' said another, 'I am cursedly glad he gave

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that upstart Saltcombe such a handling. He is ever drinking with the governor's whelp.'

'Twill be a time before he drinks again.'

'That it will ; his throat is well nigh in a pulp. What a strength the little devil has.'

'What say ye, comrades?' cried a voice from the door. 'We are just in time to march him to the square, and half the town knows that he is lost, while none that he is found. 'Twill be a pretty game.' Amid a chorus of assent I was dragged to my feet, and the lashings being taken from my legs, I was pushed up the ladder and out into the street.

CHAPTER XIV

OF THE TIGHTENING OF THE ROPE AND THE COMING OF SIMON GRISEL

IT was a weary march through the streets, and long ere we came near the market square I could hear the noise of the people as they hurried towards it. As before, I could not see them, my view being obscured by the height of the pikemen, and none guessed that this little group of soldiers had in their midst the pirate about whom there had been such a to-do.

Had they done so, I might never have reached the square, for I gathered from what my guards said that the whole town was in a ferment, some thinking I had killed everyone in the prison, others that I had escaped and fired the town, while yet others had heard nothing and were hurrying to see me hanged, although it wanted yet nearly an hour of the time.

The pikemen's little game was not to be, however, for we were stopped by a body of horse who conducted us to the prison, clearing the streets before us. I was mightily stared at by the guard and soldiery in the courtyard, but I hardly took note of what was passing, for at last I had given up all hope and was seeking as best I might to make my peace with God. As in a dream I saw the magistrates and council enter through the great gate, I felt the fetters taken from my wrists, I heard the orders given, and knew that I was marched out and along the narrow streets, but there was a buzzing in my head, and my senses seemed dulled, so that it was not till I stood upon a raised platform with the hangman and the gibbet beside me, that I came to myself and knew that the end was drawing near. I looked

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around, and the market square was filled with a sea of faces, while at the windows, and even on the roofs, were folks who had come to see me die.

A group of magnates were gathered at the far end of the platform, but besides these, a guard of two pikemen and the hangman, I was alone. I heard someone read aloud, and then he ceased, and the surge of the crowd came to my ears like the surge of the breakers on the shore of Fife.

A preacher came forward and would have spoken with me, but I would have none of him, for I had prayed enough, and was here to die; albeit I thanked him kindly and thought if there was anything I might give him to send my father if he could, but there was nothing, and I called to mind the words of the Book, 'ye brought nothing into the world, and it is certain ye shall carry nothing out.'

'Hast aught to say?' queried the hangman.

'Nothing,' I answered, 'save that I am innocent.'

At this he laid his finger against the side of his nose, and I remembered that Simon Grisel had done the same, and even wondered if it were common with Englishmen, and grieved that the only man who might have saved me was dead. The hangman would have covered my eyes with a napkin, but I bade him let alone and hurry his work, as I heard shouts and an uproar from the crowd, and judged they were angered at the delay. He put the noose around my neck, grumbling a little at its thickness, but fitting the cord with much nicety, and then I closed my eyes and felt it tighten about me, and wondered how long it would be ere my feet swung clear, and thought, for I could not help it, of Mistress Marjorie, and then there came a shout—'Hold in the Queen's name!' and the rush of feet and a roar from the crowd.

I opened my eyes, and there was Simon Grisel by my side, and, as I live, there were tears in his eyes as he grasped my hands, or the parts of them which were within reach.

'Just in time, lad,' said he, 'but 'twas a narrow squeak.' I felt the noose taken from my neck, I saw a crowd gather about me, and then I staggered and would have fallen had not Simon held me up; and the last I saw as my senses left me was his queer, solemn face and squinting eyes.

Now, what happened thereafter it were best to tell as

Simon told it me on the fore-deck of the *Water-Sprite* as we ran down the Channel under easy sail.

'Lad,' said he, 'I hardly knew you, for what with the soot on your face, the lump on your head and your torn clothes, you looked as forlorn a wight, and as ragged a rascal as one might meet in a week's journey.'

'But, Simon,' I asked, 'how came you to be in Portsmouth when I thought you were washing about in the North Sea, food for the fishes?'

'Well, lad, like you, I had a narrow squeak for life. I was mightily put out when I saw that it was not the *Deerhound* we were creeping upon, but I dare say nothing, and so when I perceived that it was all over with the galley, for Dysart was killed as well as Bartelow, I ran below to warn you; but not finding you in the cabin, I got into the store-room to reach the waist, and while in it, the galley blew up, as you know. I was terribly shaken, for the sides of the room were cracked and split, while the stout planking between it and the waist was clean blown away, which was, under God, the saving of me, for I would have choked otherwise. Howbeit, I had enough of sense left after we had sunk to swim clear, and I rose to the surface as you did, but with this difference, that I came up under a boat floating bottom up; albeit not a few of her lower planks had been shivered. I came out of the water with such a rush that my head struck violently upon one of the thwarts, and it would have been all over with me had I not, half-stunned though I was, got a hold of the seat with my hands, and there I hung for a whole day. I had plenty of air by reason of the holes in the boat's bottom, but fearing to cramp through the night, and feeling stronger, I dived, and after some trouble got astride of the boat, and sat astride of her all night and half the next day, till by the mercy of God the *Deerhound* hove in sight and took me off; and so we came to Portsmouth, though I thought all the time there was an end of you, but, as you see, we were neither of us born to be drowned, while you are not hanged yet.'

'And how did you get me through the crowd, Simon?'

'Well, lad, you see I knew the Portsmouth folk hated all pirates and filibusters, and doubted that I could get you clear away, even if I got you free from the hangman's

clutches, and so telling your tale to some of the *Deerhound's*, I found they wished for nothing better than to give me a helping hand, being angered at the *Dragon's* crew for sinking the galley; and thus, ere the folk had rightly made out what was happening, we had you through them, though not without a tussle at the end, and the rest you know.'

Now, you will wonder what Simon and I were doing on the fore-deck of a little barque which, before a merry breeze from the south-east, was howling down the Channel with twenty other gallant ships in sight, all outward bound.

If I thought, however, I was beyond all danger when I had been got aboard the *Deerhound*, I was much mistaken, as I had yet to reckon with Ned Saltcombe and the governor of the prison on their accounts, and on mine own I hoped yet to have some dealings with the red-haired villain who had betrayed me for love of gold, and had taken from me my good rapier, with which I had learned the wrist stroke of De Cusac. I was not long in the frigate, for Simon, fearing a search, had me put ashore as soon as I came to my senses; and so I was landed on the coast near a village called Gosport, which is across the water from Portsmouth, and where the country is for the most part lonely and barren.

He put a purse into my hands and bade me get a horse and make the best of my way to Plymouth, whither the *Deerhound* was to sail in three days' time, but when I begged him to give me the loan of a sword he laid his finger to his nose as he had done before, and his eye which did not squint had a twinkle in it.

'No, no, lad,' he said, 'I have known you only a short time, I confess, but from what you have told me, and from what I have seen, you seem to have to bless that same pig-sticker of yours for all your troubles, so you must even do without a blade till you are under my eye again.'

'Which eye, Simon?' I asked slyly.

At that he laughed and gave me a great blow upon the back.

'You'll do, lad, you'll do,' he said, 'and a good ride to you,' and then he got into the boat again, and I stood upon the shore and watched it rowed away up the harbour to where the *Deerhound* lay, and thanked God for the making of Simon Grisel.

I feared to buy a horse in Gosport, as they might have heard of the doings across the water, and so I tramped off to the westward, and coming to a burn, as we call a stream in Scotland, I took occasion to strip and bathe myself; and when I had dressed I felt as fit as ever, and setting a twist to my moustachios, which had dropped sadly for want of care, I whistled cheerily and resumed my march again.

After a time I ceased whistling, for though it was late in the day the sun was hot and there were no trees under which to take shelter, and so I trudged along, wondering if any mortal had ever come through such devilry in a month as I had, and pinching myself at times to make certain that I was indeed Jeremy the Squat, ex-dominie of Kirkcubright.

I must have been a trifle queer looking, for though Simon had bought me a hat which fitted me fairly, yet I had on the same ragged doublet in which I had wriggled up the chimney, and my breeches were not a little torn and frayed at the knees, so that I feared, taken together with my build and strange accent, they might serve to have me clapped in the stocks by the first villagers I came across.

This being so, I put myself to rights a little and waited till nightfall ere I entered a small hamlet, which stood in a double row on either side of the dusty road, and discerning an inn by the signboard which hung above the door, but from which all sign of anything but rain and snow had long since gone, I swaggered into it, for I judged that my best chance was to show a bold front and a blustering manner.

A little man, fat and oily, with ruddy cheeks and a squeaking voice, came forward as I entered, and looked at me askance, but when I bade him serve me with his best within ten minutes, and prepare a bed for me if he did not wish his neck twisted like a pullet's, he changed his looks and scurried off, and within the next half-hour I had to loose my waist-belt by two holes, and felt that if this were to go on I would become a second Bartelowe. I slept that night most elegantly between white sheets, which, when they have an odour of sweet lavender about them, are among the best things on God's earth for any man, and more especially for one who for a week has slept on planks and flagstones, and at times not at all, by way of variation.

The next morning I had an interview with mine host, and

as a result, he took me with him to the stable and showed me a bay horse with a thick neck and a fine way of laying back his ears.

'Here, good sir, is the horse you seek,' he squeaked; 'he would carry a man of twice your weight from here to Plymouth town in four days and never turn a hair. By his muzzle you may see the trace of the Arab in him, and by his hinder quarters that of the famed Irish breed.'

'Even so,' said I, 'and by his ears the trace of the devil. He might reach Plymouth in four days, but certain am I that I would not, for if he turned no hair upon the road, yet he would turn me by the look of him. Pass on to the next, Master Boniface.'

He grew a trifle ruddier at this, and blustered a little, but had nothing for it but to show me a grey horse in the next stall, which, as far as I could tell, for I knew nothing of a horse, seemed to be quiet and yet in fair condition, and when I had made him run it up and down the road, and felt its legs with a knowing air, I struck a bargain with him, taking also the saddle and bridle, and giving him the third price he asked, for though I knew nothing of a horse and less of the value of one, and even less of English money, yet I had not lived in Fife for naught, and Fife, as you have learned, if you knew it not before, is a shire of Scotland.

I heard the worthy landlord curse below his breath as he saw the way I mounted, but I bade him good-morrow and dug my heels into the grey's sides and away we went.

In this fashion I jolted on for three days without mishap, save that a rogue thought to rob me on the road, but thought otherwise when I had done with him, for by that time I was myself again, albeit a trifle sore in the part that sits upon a saddle.

Now, there is no need to tell you of this ride of mine and of the towns I passed through, to wit Dorchester and Axminster and Homiton, and others whose names I have forgotten, but I call to mind that I marvelled at the richness of the country and the growth of the oaks, while I found the air balmy and warm, yet strong with the sea smell, and the country folk kindly and well-mannered, though a trifle stolid and slow in their ways and very broad in their speech. Moreover, the roads were good and had sign-posts at some of the crossings, the which

are a great help and comfort to such travellers as can read them, while the sight of some cut-purse or rogue dangling from a gibbet on a convenient hill showed that there was law in the land, though having taken a pistol from the unhappy wight who had tried to rob me, I had little fear for myself, and had it not been for the jolting my good steed gave me, I should have been in excellent spirits.

On the third day then I came to Exeter, a pleasant town of good size with walls around it, and well supplied with taverns where one might have good cheer for both man and beast.

I put up at a hostel called the 'Beehive,' and having plenty of time upon my hands, I strolled out to observe the place, and found much interest by the river bank, where men were fishing with rod and line and a coloured float, after a fashion I had not seen before. Having taken stock of the town, I returned to the tavern and dined most heartily on a soup made with fish and nettles, a pastry with a rich custard and a service of oysters most fat and succulent, which I washed down by a draught of a drink called cider, made, as the serving lass told me, of apples; and I remember she laughed heartily at me for my ignorance, till I asked her if she knew aught of porridge, kail or 'the Kingdom,' upon which she said no more, but I heard her tell the landlord's wife that I had great knowledge of foreign wines, and I fear I had to pay more for my supper on that score, than I would otherwise have done. I slept at the 'Beehive' and rose early, hoping to reach Plymouth by night; but finding this cider to my taste, I fear I took overmuch of it after a dish of bacon and pig's cheek, for I soon got so drowsy that by mid-day I found myself dropping off into a dose on the grey's back, and like to drop off on to the road. This being so, I looked about for some place where I might stretch myself and have forty winks, as the saying goes; but the spot was very lonely, reaches of waste land covered with heath and woods of stunted trees, silent and solitary save for the whistle of moor fowl and the drone of beetles.

I jogged on, getting more and more drowsy, till I espied a place where there was a copse of trees and undergrowth, with a carpeting of green moss and fern-like brackens, and so tempting it looked that, leading the grey by the bridle, I went some way into the thicket, and fastening the horse

to the stem of an old and gnarled birch, I spread out a cloak I had bought at Exeter and was soon asleep, my face shaded by my broad-brimmed hat and the leafy arch above my head.

How long I lay thus I cannot tell. I awoke with a start and a feeling that someone was near me, but when I had rubbed the grit from my eyes and sat up, I could hear nothing save the rustle of the leaves and that strange hum which comes to one's ears when all is quiet—Nature's whisper, as Master Fraser calls it.

I yawned and was about to curl myself up again when a blackbird close by started off with a wild, chattering chirrup, and the grey threw up his head and spread his nostrils.

Fearing he would neigh, I threw the cloak about his head and looked to the pistol, which was of a new make and not like the dag, and then, calling to mind what old Ebe had oftentimes told me, I put my ear to the ground and listened intently. At once I caught the sound of something moving through the thicket, the crackle of branches and a thudding stroke as of hoofs upon the sward. I wondered if it might be caused by deer, but as I raised my head to look about me, for the noises had ceased, there came the whinney of a horse and the sound of a gruff voice, and I blessed my foresight in muffling the grey's head. Then, being anxious to know if someone else had found the day over warm, I crept as quietly as might be in the direction of the sounds, and after going on my hands and knees, and then crawling like a snake, I found myself close to the road near a dense part of the thicket, and, half holding my breath, I peered through the bushes, and as I did so I whistled softly to myself and marvelled at my good fortune.

CHAPTER XV

OF THE MEN IN THE THICKET AND THE HORSEMAN WHO RODE FROM EXETER

I WAS looking into a little glade in the centre of the undergrowth, and seated on the grass, with their backs resting against the thick stem of an ash tree, were two men, while a couple of horses were tethered to the bushes.

The one was a swarthy fellow, a foreigner, I felt sure, with a dark beard and a little pointed moustachios, wearing a long black cloak, from under which peeped out the sheath of a rapier. He had a flat velvet cap of the same colour tilted a little to the side of his head, while his dark eyes, set very close together, and a curious strawberry mark upon his nose, gave him a sinister and cruel appearance, which made me doubt what manner of man he was. But a glance at his companion removed all doubt from my mind and was the occasion of my whistle, for, shock-haired and ragged as when I had seen him by the light of the oil lamp, sat the villain who had trapped me in Portsmouth, and lying beside him was mine own good sword, while he had an ugly-looking knife stuck in his girdle. The swarthy man was speaking, and I thought it no harm to creep a little closer and take benefit from his conversation, albeit I kept my pistol handy.

He spoke with a curious accent, unlike the Frenchmen I had known—although it was a trifle like De Papillon's—and from what old Ebe and others had told me, I judged him to be a Spaniard; nor was I wrong, as you shall see.

'You are certain he rides this way to-day?' he asked the red-haired man.

'As certain as my name is Bill Gawblins, and, what is more, he rides with only one other, and I have taken care

the other's horse will fall lame and that not too near Exeter town.'

'You have served me well so far, and I shall pay you what I promised after we have made an end of this scourge.'

'Hast got the money here?'

'*Carrambo*, do you think I am fool enough for that. Nay, nay, friend Gawblins, I know you too well.'

The red-haired villain scowled, but the Spaniard laughed at him.

'Will he be long, think you?' he asked.

'He should be here within the hour.'

'Well, pray the Virgin he comes soon, for I am tired of this wood, and, for that matter, of your company, *amigo mio*; but trouble not to finger your rapier, for I have the pistol, and we must not quarrel.'

'Now, you have not told me how you got out of Portsmouth, and whence came this pretty toy and the gold I have seen.'

'I won a pardon, and the gold also, by showing where a little devil of a Scotch pirate was in hiding, and after all, he escaped hanging by some mischance, and I might have swung instead of him had I not made good use of shank's mare.'

'And how did you find this pirate?'

'He came across me after he had in some marvellous fashion got out of prison, and having a lack of brains, believed me when I promised to help him, and so put a snug little sum in my pouch;' and the villain grinned till he showed the yellow stumps in his gums.

A look of disgust passed over the Spaniard's face, but he said nothing, and Gawblins, taking some bread and meat from his wallet, began to eat heartily, cramming the food hastily into his mouth like the brute he was.

'You have excellent reasons for all your actions, Señor Gawblins,' said the Spaniard, after a long pause, during which the red-haired man finished the food and passed the back of his huge paw across his mouth, 'but I have never learned why you hate our friend who rides from Exeter to-day for the last time.'

'I have good reason for hating him, cursed spitfire that he is. For a little amusement I had when aboard the *Pacha*

with him in '72, he had me triced up to a gun and lashed till I could barely stand, and threatened to leave me on an island, curse him ; but, by God, he shall rue it this day !'

'Ah !' said the Spaniard, 'and what was your crime?'

'It was all over a heathen of a Mosquito Indian, who thought I should pay him for some fish he had caught, and as he argued about it, I broke his neck for him after setting him up for a target, and a fine one he made, ha, ha !'

'Hold your peace, fool !' snarled the Spaniard, 'I hear horse hoofs. You will spoil all.'

Gawblins scowled again, but kept silent, and away in the distance I could hear the sound of hoof strokes drawing nearer and nearer.

'Put the cloaks on the horses' heads, and then follow me,' said the Spaniard, and both crept close to the roadside, while I followed and bided my time. Five minutes passed, and then a horseman appeared on the top of the slope which led down to where we lay in hiding. He rode quickly, and as he drew near, I saw he was a man of middle age, with a close-cropped brown beard, and a face tanned by the sun. He seemed unused to a horse, for he bumped up and down as he rode, but I had no time to notice more, for the Spaniard muttered to his comrade,—

'Here he comes, I will fire and then out upon him, and there must be no mistake.'

The horseman seemed to suspect nothing, for he came on at a quick canter and presented a fine mark for the Spaniard, who raised his weapon, but ere he could fire I let fly at him, and whether I struck him or not his shot flew wide.

The horseman drew up sharply, reining his steed back upon its haunches, and whipped a sword out of its sheath, glancing sharply about him, and then to my surprise a couple of men ran out from the other side of the road and attacked him fiercely. I saw him lean over in his saddle and run one of them through the body, and then Gawblins and the Spaniard, who had seemed mightily put out when I fired, left their shelter and ran at him with loud shouts, while I followed.

'Ha !' cried the horseman, 'the odds are a trifle heavy,' and he struck at the Spaniard, but missed him.

'Have with you !' I roared at the pitch of my voice, and brought my pistol butt down with all my force on the head

of the man who held his bridle. The fellow dropped like a stone, and I rushed at Gawblins.

'By the bones of the saints,' he shouted, 'tis the pirate,' and laughed at me; but I ran in under his blade and threw him as I had thrown the natural at the prison gate. We grappled fiercely and rolled over and over in the dust, for he was a very strong man and heavy withal; but at last I snatched the knife from his belt and stabbed him twice in the chest, and he straightway ceased to trouble me. Nor would he trouble anyone again in this world, though, as I live, Satan must have found him a hard imp to manage.

When I got upon my feet at last, covered with dust and stained with blood, I found the horseman dismounted and quietly wiping his sword on the body of the man whose skull I had cracked.

'By Queen Bess,' he said, staring hard at me, 'this is a shrewd blow you have struck. The back of the fellow's skull is driven flat.'

'I have learned the need of such,' I said.

'You are a Scot, by your tongue?'

'Even so.'

'Well, Master Scot, this is a pretty day's work. Here be three dead men upon the Queen's highway.'

'Where is the Spaniard?' I asked him, looking around me.

'Whew!' he said, 'so the swarthy man was one of those dogs. I would have killed him, only he ran like any hare into the woods. But how do you know aught of him, sir?'

I told him how I had come upon the rogues, and he listened, gravely nodding now and again.

'So, so,' he said, 'a well-laid plot. But thanks to you, sir, it has miscarried; and now I shall ask you to say naught of this, and we will bury these poor devils and cast loose their horses.'

'A moment, sir,' said I, 'but this rascal has my sword and a few crowns which he came by in a curious fashion and which will repay a loan.'

He stared at me again, and seeing he wondered what I meant, I told him part of my story as we buried the men in shallow graves dug with Bill Gawblins's knife and a sharpened stake.

'So, so,' he said, 'I heard the fellow call you pirate. By my

head, you are like a cat, forever landing on your feet. You are the very man to be a mariner. Where are you bound for now?’

‘I ride to Plymouth,’ I answered.

‘Then we shape the same course,’ he said. ‘You come in place of my worthy man Henry Deadlights, who I warrant is still cursing at his horse’s lameness. But what is your name?’

‘Jeremy Clephane,’ I replied, ‘but some call me the Squat.’

At this he laughed heartily.

‘It is no bad name,’ he said, ‘and this same squatness has served you well. Tit for tat is fair play, they say, so know that I am Francis Drake, mariner and soldier, a good servant of Queen Bess, whom may God bless. There is a couplet for you,’ and he raised his cap.

I started when I heard that the man to whom I had been of service was no other than the great English seaman whose fame had reached us even in Kirkcaldy, and I knew now why the Spaniards had called him a scourge, and why these men, who were Catholics, and in the pay of Spain, had lain in wait for him. And yet, when I looked at him I saw he was just such a man as I had fancied Drake must be. He was rather under the middle height, but of a beautiful build, with a deep chest and sturdy limbs, a thick-set neck and an easy carriage, with somewhat of a roll in it begotten of his sea life. His hair and beard were brown and close cropped, and he had a sharp and mobile face, in which were set two grey eyes as keen as any hawk’s. For the rest, he had a quick way of talking, and a knack of making you trust him at first sight; at least, so it was with me, for otherwise I would not have told him all I had done.

He wore a doublet of russet colour trussed in front, and a ruff and chain of gold about his neck, while his cloak was rolled up and fastened to his saddle by reason of the heat of the day. Such was Sir Francis Drake as I saw him on the last week of August in the year of grace 1585.

It was not long before we were on the road again, riding at a brisk pace, for Plymouth was fully thirty miles distant, and it was past mid-day. My new acquaintance was in wonderful spirits at having escaped falling a victim to the assassins, and laughed and jested and told me tales of sea-

fights and brave doings in foreign parts, till I swore to myself that I had never known a better comrade; and presently I told him so, at which he laughed still more.

'Ah, Master Clephane,' he said, 'I am just now like a boy upon a holiday, but I shall have care and trouble enough soon, therefore I make the most of it when I can.'

'Dost fear another attempt upon your life?' I asked.

'Nay, nay, 'tis not that; I am safe in Plymouth town. But in a fortnight's time I sail for the Indies, and there is much to do and to see about, for I reckon on at least twenty sail, and pray God we'll have some fair sport with the plate ships of his good majesty of Spain.'

'Amen,' said I, and he laughed again.

'Have you aught to do in Plymouth?' he asked me presently.

'I have to meet the *Deerhound* and Simon Grisel.'

'And then?'

'I know not what to do thereafter.'

'Then,' said he, 'why should you not sail with me? There is one ship's company not yet made up, and I can promise you a wondrous voyage and mayhap a pocketful of gold at the end o't, if all goes well. A stout heart and a good blade are what we want, and you are the one and have the other, Master Clephane, so what say you?'

I thought awhile ere I answered, for I had never dreamed of such a thing, and yet I felt there was no reason why I should not go.

I had no prospects in England save a chance of being lodged in prison once more if Ned Saltcombe came across me, and here was an adventure after mine own heart, with mayhap a modicum of riches at the end of it, and yet, like a young bird which fears to try its first flight, I hesitated.

'There is Simon Grisel,' I answered. 'He may have some plan or other.'

'Look you, my canny Scot,' said Sir Francis, 'is this Grisel a long man with a solemn visage and a squinting eye?'

'Even so. Dost know him?'

'Know Simon? Why, though half a soldier, he is as tough an old sea-dog as any that tread a plank; he rounded the Horn with me but two years ago. Rest assured, Master

Clephane, he will rise to the bait as a Devon trout rises to a blue-bottle. So again, what say you ?'

'An Simon goes, then I go too,' I answered.

'Bravo!' he cried. 'Spoken like a man and a Scot, than whom are no better fighters under the sun; and now let us clap on sail or it will be morning ere we get to Plymouth town.'

We spoke little after that, and reached the seaport soon after it had fallen dark; and when I would have left him he would not hear tell of it, but made me share supper with him—and a most excellent one it was, for, as I soon found, Sir Francis Drake was a name with which to conjure in Plymouth, and nothing was too good for him; albeit, he could on occasion put up with sorry fare, and, what is more, enjoy it to the full.

If I had thought Leith a busy place, I laughed at the idea now, for this Plymouth was as full of bustle and excitement as an egg is full of meat, and all day long there was much coming and going between the ships and the shore, the clatter of hammers, and the lading of stores and powder. A great fleet lay in the bay—a dozen ships of war and twice that number of small traders and galleys, while there seemed no end to the little skiffs and boats plying about on the fine sheet of water, on the shores of which stood the brave old town, grey and picturesque, its streets thronged with mariners—merry fellows, sun-browned and broad-chested, who spat and romped, and trolled out ditties all day long, and for that matter all night also, and I verily believe there was not one of them who would not have gone through fire and water to serve Sir Francis.

The next day the *Deerhound* came in, and I met Simon again. When he heard my tale, for I had permission to tell him of it, he sat down and shook with inward laughter, and swore he had never heard the like—being especially tickled at seeing me with my rapier once again—and all that day he kept staring at me, till I asked him if he had seen through me yet, and whether he saw aught in my interior which differed from what was in other men.

'Not I, lad,' he said, 'but your doings would make a cat laugh.'

'They do more than that,' said I.

'What, lad?'

'They make a certain solemn old sea-dog, called Simon Grisel, to shake his sides.'

'Tis true, lad, 'tis true. I have not laughed so much since— But that is another tale,' he added, and I noticed that his face grew sad, and judged that a story lay hidden under his queer manner and silent ways, and that Simon had been another man in days gone by; nor was I wrong, as shall in time be seen.

For a week the fleet lay in Plymouth refitting, and I saw little of Sir Francis, having been placed on board the *Water Sprite*—a tight and well found barque of one hundred-and-fifty tons burthen, with six guns and a crew of fifty, besides gentlemen of birth who served on board—and nothing would please Simon but that he should follow me as servant, for, as he said, he had sickened of playing the spy, and longed for another bout with the yellow skins, as he called the Spaniards.

Although I held no post aboard, being but an adventurer, yet I had enough to do, for I had to buy an outfit, and appeared to much advantage in a headpiece of steel and a back and breastplate of the same worn over my doublet, which was of claret colour, most elegantly cut and trussed with lacings of yellow silk, while my nether parts were busked in strong sea-boots of Simon's choosing, and stout trunk hose, and this, with my good sword, and a pistol and dagger, of the best Bill Gawblins's money could buy, fitted me out in as gallant a manner as any soldier of the fleet. Moreover, to get a knowledge of the work, I doffed these gay feathers and set my back to it with the crew, hoisting in powder kegs and sea-stores, and trolling out a merry stave with the best of them.

As for Simon, he was here, there and everywhere, getting a vast deal of work out of his stringy frame and making nothing of it, but smiling grimly as he heard the chorus peal out,—

'With a yo heave ho, and a roundelay,
Up with the anchor, and so away.'

In the evening we would sit and smoke, for I had taken most lovingly to a pipe, and many a brave tale of galleons and treasure ships, wild men and wilder beasts, he told me to the tune of the creaking windlass and the stamp of feet.

In a week's time then all was ready, and we put to sea, bound for Portsmouth, where some of the fleet were lying, together with many men of the crews, and among them the captain of the *Water Sprite*. There were brave doings on shore ere we started for Plymouth again, but I took good care to keep on board and say little, for I had seen enough of the town, and from a strange point of view.

The day before we sailed, Captain Swan appeared, a little fussy man with a red face and a loud voice, who had a trick of beginning every sentence with the words 'hocus pocus,' which of all manner of speech is the strangest I have known, and means I cannot tell what; nor could I ever find out, for it is not an oath, neither has any sense as far as I can gather. On account of this strange habit he went by the name of old Hocus, or, at times, old Pocus, and even now and then old Hocus Pocus, and hereby hangs a tale, the plot of which came in the end to be of more moment than I had thought possible.

I had heard no other name given him than Captain Hocus and once or twice Pocus, and so thought he had no other, though it seemed to me a strange one even for an Englishman; therefore when he came aboard, I thought it well to make myself known to him, and bowing low, spoke to him as Captain Hocus. At this he flew into a mighty passion.

'Hocus pocus, sir!' he stuttered. 'Am I to be befooled on the poop of my own ship? You are arrested, sirrah. Below with you! Dost hear me?'

'I crave your pardon, sir,' said I, 'but I erred unwittingly, for I did not know your name was Pocus.'

'Pocus, sir,' he fairly bellowed; 'hocus pocus be d—d to you, sir. Have irons put on this insolent fellow,' he shouted to the crew, who were sore with laughter. 'I shall teach you to miscall Captain Swan of the *Water Sprite*, sirrah!'

Seeing he was in too great a passion to listen to aught I might say, I slipped below till the storm blew over; but though he laughed at it afterwards over his wine, yet he bore me a grudge, which caused him, when the time came—but I am forereaching and must go cannily, so let me clew up, as mariners say, and feel my ground.

The crew I found to be worthy fellows for the most part, though a trifle rough and ready in their ways, and I was

overjoyed to see Master Rogers come aboard the morning on which we sailed, and to learn he had left the *Golden Dragon*, for, as he told me later, he could by no means stand the airs and very vile temper of Ned Saltcombe, whose neck had not yet recovered from my grip.

The next day we reached Plymouth again, and it was on the 14th of September 1585 that all being in readiness, the fleet, to the number of five-and-twenty vessels, great and small, weighed anchor, and with much waving and hoisting of flags, cheering, and the boom of cannons, swept out of the bay with a blare of trumpets and a brave show of canvas.

There were but four Queen's ships amongst them, the rest being owned by traders and gentlemen of birth, who hoped to gain some glory and more gold by the voyage. Of great three-masted ships there were the *Lion*, the *Elizabeth Bonaventure*, the flagship, the *Golden Dragon*, and the *Deerhound*, while of two-masted, there were the *Water Sprite*, the *Goshawk*, the *Rainbow* and many more, and aboard them were a most gallant company of three thousand men good and true, with Sir Francis as admiral, and under him that great navigator, Martin Frobisher, and Captain Francis Knollys as rear-admiral. Captain Thomas Fanner was in command of the flagship, and General Christopher Carlile was leader of the troops.

As I looked at the brave show, although I was a Scotchman, yet my heart stirred within me, and I wondered what that fierce old sea-dog, Andrew Wood, would have said to such a great fleet as this; and again thinking of the admiral's words anent the plate ships and the galleons of Spain, I said 'Amen,' and to fall in with the fashion, whistled for a fair breeze and a quick run.

And thus it was, as I have told you before, that Simon Grisel and I sat and talked together on the fore-deck of the barque *Water Sprite* as, outward bound for the Indies, she breasted with her bluff bows the short, crisp waves of the Channel.

CHAPTER XVI

OF THE STORY OF SIMON GRISEL

WHETHER it was due to my whistling or not, certain it is that day after day the wind was favourable and wafted us southward and westward ho, so that the fleet kept well together; and every morning I could see the broad expanse of ocean dotted over with white clouds of canvas, some near at hand, others away on the horizon, looking like a sea bird's-wing in the far distance.

The vessels varied in size, from the great gun-ship with three decks of ordnance, high pooped, and deep-waisted, which went snoring along, plunging through the ocean surges in clouds of spray, down to the little fly-boats and pinnaces, some of not more than fifteen tons burthen, but stout little craft for all that, pitching and tossing, but speeding onwards at a marvellous rate considering their small spread of sail and tiny hulls.

Each morning and evening there was a blare of trumpets, sounding very sweet and mellow, and much signalling, and then divine service was held aboard each craft, for such was the order of the admiral, and we prayed for a good voyage and freedom from sickness, and much sport with the galleons and colonies of Spain.

There was little to do in those days, and from Master Rogers and Simon Grisel I soon learned the art of navigating, the starry heavens, and much as to soundings and anchorages, the which was to serve me in good stead in days to come.

Moreover, I grew to be very friendly with Master Rogers, but even more so with Simon Grisel, till one evening I made bold to ask him the story of his life, for from what he had told me I judged it had been a rough one and well

worth the hearing. He smoked silently at his pipe for full ten minutes ere he answered me, but at last he took it from his mouth and spat over the side, for we were leaning on the bulwarks watching the flash and play of the night-light in the water.

'Well, lad,' he said, 'as you have asked me, I will tell it you, but I have told it to none other. Howbeit, as I am in your service for good or ill, it is but fitting you should know all concerning me, so wait till I but charge the bowl and I will spin the yarn.'

He tapped his long pipe against the side, and a shower of sparks flew downwards, then filling it, he set it between his teeth, and after a suck or two, commenced his tale. Even yet I can close my eyes and conjure up the scene. It was a still night, save for the creak of block or tackle, the lap of the water and the sound of a chorus from a ship to windward of us, but it was not so dark as to prevent me seeing Simon's solemn visage, wrinkled and weatherbeaten, with the squinting eye looking everywhere but at me. I could mark also the thin lips, hooked nose, and sharp chin which gave Simon a look apart from other men, and stamped him as one with whom it was well to be at peace; for there was something in him which called to my mind old Hal Clephane, albeit that my father was a far bulkier man and had no squint.

'I was born, lad,' he said, 'full fifty years ago, in the reign of bluff old King Hal, and in the town of Canterbury, in Kent. My father was a saddler and armourer, and had five other children, three of them boys and two maids, though of these a boy and maid died in infancy. We lived in a house adjoining the armoury, and under shadow of the great cathedral where the priest, A Becket, was done to death, and the stains were to be seen upon the flags when I was young, and for all I know, may be there to this day, while, if that is not proof enough, his tomb is there also. The days passed quietly enough for us, with no more excitement than watching the coming and going of the few pilgrimages which even then came to visit the shrine, and now and then seeing some great church dignitary and his armed escort ride into the town with much pomp and glory.

'Being the eldest, I, with my second brother, was put to my father's trade, which was most flourishing, these being busy

days and the country unsettled, for King Hal had died by this time and Edward held a feeble grasp on the throne. As for me, I cared more for riding horses than saddling them, but I buckled to with vigour, and had good prospect of filling my father's shoes with credit and to my own advantage, when events occurred which made an end of him and his trade together, and all but made an end of me also. This was neither more nor less than the death of the king and the accession of Mary of Aragon, since called, as you know, "The Bloody Queen," and well named, say I, for such a she-devil was never born.

'If old King Hal had been an enemy chiefly to his wives and the Pope, this Mary was an enemy most of all to her subjects, the reformed faith, and her husband, and ere long the people saw the danger which threatened them. Her promises were broken—Cranmer, Ridley and Latimer were clapt in prison, and Bonner and Gardiner came into power.

'In Canterbury we soon had an inkling that this was not the way to please the people, and I remember well it was on a summer's evening that a horseman came spurring into the town, and put up at the sign of  Becket, as the chief tavern was then called, though I am told that both house and name have gone long since.

'Well, lad, we soon felt the doings of this stranger, for a spirit of discontent spread among us, slowly at first, and then more quickly. There were mutterings at the market and secret meetings at night, while our forges roared and our hammermen and leather-cutters wrought as they had never done before.

'Within a month of his coming, Kent was ripe for a rising, and I, caring a little about religion, and more about the chance of seeing somewhat of life, threw myself heart and soul into the movement, little thinking I was to see more of death than life, and come near to suffering myself. My father fell in with the plot also, and being a man with a long head and a heavy purse, old Reuben Grisel held no small post among the schemers, and many a night spoke forth to a gaping crowd in the armoury against the iniquities of the scarlet woman and the coming of the dreaded inquisition. My mother and little sister were set to work upon a banner, and I can tell you, lad, our hands were full.

'At last all was ready and the men of Kent were to rise under Sir Thomas Wyatt, drive Mary from the throne, and set Lady Jane Grey upon it in her stead.

'Before this, however, news reached us that the lads of Devon were ripe for rebellion, and it was resolved to send a messenger to them to find out how the land lay in the west. Here was my chance, and I was not slow to take it!

'Though but a stripling of nineteen years, I was well known as a most fearless rider, while I could strike a shrewd blow, and my squinting eye gave me a fierce look which was deemed useful for the errand. It was no light matter to ride from Kent to Devon in the service of the rebels, but I was reckless and hot-headed in those days, and thought more of the rewards and honours I should have than the dangers and the chance of death.

'I had money in plenty, good horses, and I rode by night, and in this way, despite a narrow squeak or two, I came to Devon in due time and delivered my message. Nevertheless, I doubted the success of the rising in the west, for the men, though brave fellows and as good Protestants as one could wish for, had no leaders and were ill-armed, yet I trusted for the best and cheered them with tales of our doings in Kent, and the gallant words of brave Sir Thomas, and leaving them with many a hearty wish and God-speed, I set out upon my return.

'I soon found that if it had been a hard matter to get from Kent to Devon, it would be well nigh impossible to ride from Devon to Kent, for the Queen had taken alarm, troops were moving to the west, and, as the French say, everyone was on the *qui vive*. I reached Hampshire without mishap, but there I was caught in a wayside inn by a body of Papish troops, and had a terrible fight for it in the doorway. I struck down their leader and managed to burst through them and mount, but as I rode off, plying spur and lash as hard as I could, I was struck on the head by a spent bullet, and fell senseless on the road.

'Some were for killing me at once as I had killed one man and wounded two more, but the more cautious among them deemed it wiser to send me back to London under guard, no doubt to see what thumb-screws and hot pincers might wring from me. With the help of a serving-maid, how-

ever, I managed to escape from the villains at the village of Richmond, and taking a horse from a man on the road who was terrified at my looks, for the blood had dried upon my face and I was as filthy as a packman, I rode with all haste to the south. Ill luck followed me, howbeit, for the horse was a restive brute and threw me as I was taking a short cut across country to avoid some Spanish troops which were marching on London from Portsmouth. My head struck a stone, and for the second time in a week I was stunned and helpless. After that I took a fever in the brain, and for days lay in a peasant's hut, half dead, raving like a madman, and unconscious of all save a burning heat in my skull and the dancing of lights before my eyes.

'When the fever left me I was weak as a child, but as soon as I could crawl I left the peasants, who would take nothing by way of reward, although they were Catholics and must have learned everything during my delirium.

'Terrible was the news that reached me. The Devon rising had failed utterly, as I had feared, and though the brave men of Kent had at first carried all before them and taken Southwark and Westminster, they had been crushed the week before, and Sir Thomas Wyatt and hundreds of his followers had been taken captive. Sir Thomas had been executed at Temple Bar, a little way out of London, and the others, I learned, were to suffer a like fate.

'God knows, lad, how I did it, but, weak as I was, I managed to reach the capital, travelling day and night, but I was only in time to see my father and brother strangled like the vilest criminals, and at the sight the fever came upon me again, and for weeks I was no better than a corpse; but for some reason or other I could not die, and managed, starving and miserable, to make my way to Canterbury. But I had better not have gone near it, for Spanish troops on the way from Dover had been lodged there, my little sister was dead, frightened to death by these inhuman devils, and my mother was a maniac hurrying fast to the grave. The only consolation I had was the knowledge that the Kentish men had seized upon the villains who had wrought this trouble, and hanged every one of them, but I vowed that by the help of God I would have my revenge, and, Jeremy, I have kept my vow.

‘From that day I was a changed man. I grew cautious and gloomy, even more so than you now see me, for time works wonders, otherwise I could not have told you all this fearful tale.

‘I soon found that England was no place for a man to live in, and with hundreds of others I left the country while the fires of Smithfield blazed to heaven, calling down vengeance on the bloody Queen; for the next ten years I was fighting for the Huguenots under the Prince of Condé, and that is why I am more of a soldier than a mariner, though, in very truth, I think I have been a Jack-of-all-trades, for I have cooked for Frenchmen, done mason work for Spaniards, and doctored horses for the infidel Turk.

‘The year ’66 gave me my chance against the Spaniards, for the Hollanders revolted against Philip and his inquisition, and I soon had as much fighting as I could get through with, and twice escaped from prison, though I came near being beheaded with Egmont and Horn, and was placed on a Spanish galley, where my back was cut to ribands with the lash, and many a time I cursed the day that I was born. In ’71 I was at Lepanto, where the fleets of Spain and Venice met that of the Turks and broke it up in a terrible fashion.

‘I fell into the hands of the infidels, but saved my neck from the bow-string by my knowledge of saddle-making and the doctoring of horses, for a Turk loves a horse better than a woman, and next to himself. I escaped by a ruse, and after running not a few dangers, was back in Paris in ’72, and there I saw the fearful massacre on Saint Bartholomew’s day; but by lying low and telling more lies than I had coins in my pouch, I not only escaped, but sent many a human butcher to the purgatory he believed in, or perchance a trifle further. Two years thereafter I was in the Netherlands again, shut up in the town of Leyden, which was besieged by a great Spanish army. The idea came to me of washing out the villains, and the Hollanders, who are worthy fellows, but thick in the uptake, marvelled when they saw to what use their flat country and water-ways could be put. We opened the sluices, thereby forcing the yellow skins to raise the siege, and all but drowning them like rats in a hole.

‘Strange to say, after this I felt for a time that I had seen enough of war and bloodshed, and hearing that once

more a man might live at peace in England, I crossed to London, but took good care not to go near Canterbury, for my heart was sore even after all these years, and though I had known many a comrade, I had not a friend in the wide world, nor, for that matter, lad, did I ever have one till I met a certain squat Scotchman in a pirate galley.'

He ceased speaking for a while, and, for my part, I stood silent in the darkness, with a great pity rising in my heart for this lonely man, and felt my ills and wrongs shrink to nothing in the light of the story he had told me.

After a time he continued his tale.

'In London I found work to do as a stableman, and might, had I chosen, married the innkeeper's daughter, despite my squint and silent ways; but I grew restless again, and hearing that Captain Francis Drake, as our good admiral was then called, was fitting out a fleet at Plymouth, I made my way thither, but was robbed on the road and had nothing left for it but to ship as a common mariner aboard the *Pelican*, a stout barque of one hundred tons. There were four other craft, all smaller, and but one hundred and sixty odd men aboard of them, but they were nearly all seamen and had most worthy leaders.

'We sailed towards the end of '77, and followed this very course—for I reckon that we are bound for the Cape de Verd Islands, by the lie of the compass. We had varying fortunes, capturing the great wine ship of Portugal, of which I have told you, and leaving Port St Julian, we came, in August of the next year, to the Straits of Magalhaens, where the sea seems never to rest, and 'tis most cursedly cold.

'*Carrambo!* as the dons say, we had a time of it there, for the *Elizabeth* made for home, the *Marigold* was lost, and the *Mary* broken up, while the *Swan* having parted company before, we were left alone in this stormy sea. At last we reached the ocean called Pacific—though 'tis a lying name that has been given it, as I can bear witness—and then the captain took it into his head to seek a way home by the northern pole.

'Happily for us, he was dissuaded by the crew and the cold, and crossing the western sea, we reached home by the Eastern Indies and the Cape of Good Hope, where there is a most curious hill, as flat on the summit as the ship's deck.

'I have told you before, lad, much of what we saw, but you will never know it fully till you get a glimpse of these same tropics, which, please God, you shall ere many weeks are gone. You may think that we had a right royal welcome when we came to Deptford, and as many songs were made in honour of the *Golden Hind*—for so the *Pelican* had been re-named—as ever were coined out of the brain of man.

'I call to mind a most excellent conceit, painted on the sign of the "Queen's Head" tavern. It ran in this fashion, and methinks a clever man must have written the same:—

' "O Nature ! to old England still
Continue these mistakes ;
Still give us for our Kings such Queens,
And for our Dux such Drakes. "'

'In truth, very pretty and fitting withal,' I said, laughing.

'There were many others, too, could I but remember them, and good Queen Bess came on board our craft and had us all before her, and could not see enough, till I feared Sir Francis, as he at once became, would have his head turned ; but, by my faith, lad, it is set too firmly upon his shoulders.

'Thereafter, having a pocket full of money, I lived in comfort for a time, but at last, for something to do, took to playing the spy, as you know, and now, here I am, servant to the very worshipful Master Jeremy Clephane, and hey ho for the westward and the galleons of Spain, say I !' and the old pikeman slapped his long, lean thigh till it sounded as if a sail had split.

'God bless you, Simon,' I said ; 'you are no servant of mine, but as worthy a friend as man could wish to find, and here is my hand upon it for weal or woe, as we say north of the Tweed.'

There, on the fore-deck of the *Water Sprite*, we gave one another a handgrip which tingled to our fingers' ends, and sealed a comradeship broken only when Simon passed to his rest, and that but for a time, a brief space, that is now well nigh past ; and I thank God that it is so.

'Simon,' said I, 'you have told me all your story, and now I will tell you what you do not know of mine.'

When he heard of De Cusac, Maid Marjorie, the Popish plot and my plan of escape, he whistled long and loud.

'Beshrew me ! but in a way your tale beats mine,' he said ; 'albeit, we seem both to have meddled with affairs of State, and that to our hurt. 'Tis a good thing you are out of England, though I reckon they are keeping matters quiet for a bit to draw the net more fully at the end ; there will be no little stir over this when the time comes. Well, well, we are far enough away from all that turmoil, thank the Lord, for it is what turns men's heads grey if they have not been lopped off in youth ; and now, lad, let us get below, for yonder is the first streak of dawn, and old Hocus Pocus will not have one lie abed on board his ship.'

CHAPTER XVII

OF THE DOINGS OF CAPTAIN HOCUS POCUS AND THE CREW OF THE 'WATER SPRITE'

I FEAR that it would but weary you were I to set down, as is the fashion of some, the events which took place on every day of this my first voyage, for to say truth, little befell us before we reached the regions of the western islands.

As Simon had opined, we were bound in the first place for the islands of Cape de Verd, which we reached without mishap, and landing at a place called Porto Praya, took it without difficulty, the people flying for their lives and taking what treasures they had with them. There I saw in a way a few of the wonders of the Tropics, there being small palms, tamarinds, and trees rejoicing in the strange name of baobabs, but the island on which we landed was mountainous and stony in large measure, and Simon laughed at me when I spoke to him of its wonders.

Albeit I was mightily amused at the monkeys, of which there were many, and I made acquaintance with creatures called turtles, which crawl out of the sea to deposit their eggs on shore, so that the sun may save them the trouble of the hatching, which, as they lay many, is a wise saving of labour—at least so it seems to me.

We marched some twelve miles into the interior and took a small town, the name of which I cannot call to mind; but a large force threatening to descend upon us, we made for the ships, and having laid in fresh stores and filled the water casks, we set sail well pleased with our doings, for we had not hoped to gain treasure here, and our landing was but for the puprose of letting the folk know that Sir Francis Drake yet sailed the seas, as they had committed violence on a ship's company from England not long before.

We had a very fair wind with us after leaving the Cape de Verds, and I spent my time listening to Simon's tales, which, if they were put into a book, would make man wonder at what a single mortal may pass through. Also I took care to learn something of Spanish from him, deeming that it might prove useful, for in those days there were more Spaniards than Englishmen on the western seas. Thus on we went day by day over a calm sea, at the most ruffled by the gentle breeze into curling, froth-topped wavelets which shone and glistened in the warm sunlight, and it soon grew so hot that the pitch in the seams was at mid-day soft as butter in the summer-time. We saw countless numbers of what are called flying fish, fish that can skim over the ocean's surface as the swallows do over the duck pond at Kirkcoun, and very pretty they are to see, looking like bars of silver as they speed above the waves and vanish again with tiny splash and ripple. As we drew near land, many birds also were in sight, some large, some small, but all restless and noisy, save one great fellow which, poised aloft on outspread wings, seemed to be sleeping till he caught sight of his prey, and then in very truth he was sufficiently wide awake, as the poor fish found after he had made his swoop.

We were followed also by huge sharks, ravening monsters with one sharp fin upon the back which cuts the water like a knife, and is a danger signal to any bather, though for the most part it is seen too late. Indeed, one day when it had fallen calm, there being none of the brutes about, half the ship's company betook themselves to bathe, and some being venturesome, swam a good distance off, with the result that the sharks appearing of a sudden one of the swimmers was devoured by them, and another all but lost his foot as he was being dragged by a rope up the ship's side. This most sad event cast a gloom upon us, which was not dispelled till one fine morning the look-out shouted that land was in sight, and presently there was much signalling among the fleet, while on the *Water Sprite* many of us were in a ferment, not having been in these regions before.

We learned that this land was Dominica, one of the leeward islands, and as we drew near it, I, for one, did not wonder that men raved of the loveliness of these ocean gems, as I have heard them called. Great mountains sloped

upwards from the water's edge, clad to the summit by dense masses of glorious green foliage, through which here and there peeped bright-coloured flowers, and clear cascades went tumbling down the steep hillsides to the sea.

Along the crests of the mountain ridges were set great trees, some with long, slender stems and feathery tops, others thick stemmed and bushy, while over all the fair scene the morning light of a tropic sun streamed, at one part showing up the vivid green, at another casting woods and rocks into a tempting shade. We sailed slowly round the island, which was but small as islands go, and I marked how the sea grew wondrous clear and rich-coloured as it neared the verdure-covered cliffs and bright, sandy shores.

'Truly, thought I to myself, if ever there was a paradise, here it is,' but the back fin of a shark, darting along between the ship and the shore, made me remember that even this lovely spot had drawbacks, of which we know little or nothing in our cold northern land.

I would I had the power to write of all the beauty and wonders which were to be seen when we had come to an anchorage in a most agreeable harbour, but as I am a modest man, so I am a plain one, and even the most fanciful of men would, I fear, find it a hard task. Suffice to say that if from the harbour all was lovely, it was even more so when we set foot on shore, and I thought I should never tire of gazing at the strange trees, the queer, bright-plumaged birds, and those hideous creatures known as lizards, though they are by no means like the lizards I have seen in England, being much larger, with huge, misshapen heads, and in parts of a most vivid colour, as if to match the trees and flowers amongst which they live.

There were insects also, great and small, and some most venomous, feeding upon the blood with much joy and greediness, and singing the while as they sucked, and I thanked God we had not such in Fife, for they took a wondrous liking to me, though they would have naught to do with Simon, finding, I have no doubt, that he was too lean and stringy a mortal to make it worth their while to fasten upon him and risk crushing from his great horny paw. I envied the folk who lived in this lovely spot, albeit they were brown in colour and stunk most foully of oil.

Nevertheless, they were well built and wondrous swimmers, caring no whit for the sharks, which they scared away by much shouting and splashing.

They were and, for all I know, are still a jovial race, and took much delight in some beads and playthings we had taken at the spoiling of Porto Praya, so that having laid in a good supply of fruit and fresh water we left them in high good humour, though a trifle afraid of the sound of the great guns with which we paid them a salute. Thereafter we sailed for the north, passing several islands but touching at none till we came to Saint Christopher, named after that great mariner Columbus, who, as you may know, was the first to discover these regions, and it is a pleasure to me to think that he was not a Spaniard, but a man of Genoa, though, to be sure, his ships bore the flag of Spain. This Saint Christopher is also a fine island, though, for my part, I thought Dominica the more beautiful of the twain, and here again we traded with the natives, and the mariners told them much as to the great Queen across the waters and the power of England, and warned them against the yellow skins; but for my part, taking a chief aside, I let him know somewhat of Scotland and the doings of that fierce old sea-dog Andrew Wood, till I trust he had a sense of the fitness of things and knew which was the greater nation.

You will no doubt wonder how I did this, as I knew nothing of the language; but if you bear in mind that the Spaniards had been there, and that both the chief and myself knew something of their lingo, you will have solved the riddle, though, to tell the truth, I reminded Simon, who knew this tongue as well as half a-dozen others, that he was my servant and bade him interpret for me.

I trust he did as I told him, but when he spoke for me there was a twinkle in his good eye, and, as we say north of the Tweed, 'I hae ma doots'—howbeit, let that pass. Here also I found time to see Sir Francis again, and found him very pleasant and courteous and full of hope for the voyage, and he laughed heartily when I gave him my opinion of these parts, and made me known to Martin Frobisher and others of the leaders, and so I left him well pleased and little thinking of all that should come to pass ere I spoke with him again. After leaving Saint Kitts, as it is called by

way of brevity, we shaped a course westward and to the north for a great island called San Domingo, and there is little to tell of this part of the cruise, for I spent it chiefly in trying the fruits we had taken aboard and thereby made myself ill, there being somewhat of a mixture upon my stomach, to wit, a pear called the avocado, which is eaten as a vegetable, sugar apples which are in nowise like our pippins at home, pine-apples which are still less like pippins, guavas, wild grapes, plums, long yellow fruits with white pulps, whose names I cannot remember, but whose taste was most excellent, yams and lemons, oranges and limes, and half-a-dozen more, some of which I long to taste again, and others I care not if I ever see, and most of them I would class with the latter, for give me rather a juicy wall pear than any fruit of the tropics I have ever seen, smelt or tasted.

When I had ceased to wonder whether I should die or not, I found all on board full of hope and expectation, for we trusted to get much treasure at San Domingo, there being on it a rich town of the same name, which traded largely with Spain and was most flourishing.

I found also that Captain Swan had lost his temper once more, for having wagered that the *Water Sprite* could beat another barque of the same size, each running on the same tack and with the same sail set, he had lost the wager, which was no wonder, as the *Water Sprite* was somewhat of a barrel and bluff-bowed, and despite her name accounted one of the heaviest sailers in the fleet. We reached the island without adventure, and our arrival caused no little stir among the wealthy dons who traded in slaves, spices, precious metals, fine woods, and whatever else would bring in the gold they loved. Learning that they had a strong force in the town, Sir Francis sent a negro boy ashore with a flag of truce, but the fools of Spaniards foully killed him and sent his head aboard the *Bonaventure*. At this Sir Francis swore he would teach the villains a lesson they were not likely to forget, and forthwith we were busy enough on board the *Water Sprite*. Captain Swan, as was his custom when roused, hocus-pocussed mightily and cursed all to whom he spoke, but none paid any heed to him as there was much to do in the furbishing up of weapons and the overhauling of armour.

At length all being ready, we landed to the number of thirty boat-loads, and drew up to the westward of the town in two divisions. The enemy had thrown up breastworks, but we charged at them with a mighty cheer, and a panic seizing upon them, after firing wildly at us, they fled for dear life. A few made a stand, but were met by the men of the *Water Sprite* with Simon and myself, and we made short work of them, the mariners slashing vigorously with their hangers, while the gentlemen adventurers put in much pretty play with the rapier and used their pistols to good effect.

I had the good fortune to save Simon from a stroke which would not have added to his beauty, even if it had not cracked his skull, for a huge negro who was fighting for the dons aimed a blow at him with an axe, but I rushed on him unnoticed and thrust him through both forearm and neck, so that his blow and the course of his life were ended together, much to Simon's delight, for he had not seen me use the rapier before, and himself preferred, when he could not have his pike, a heavy sword with a keen edge, which would not have been of much avail against a stroke, being cumbersome to wield and worked over-much from the shoulder—at least so it seems to me.

We were very quickly in the town and set a few places ablaze to scare the folk a little more, if that were possible; but the men, by order of Sir Francis, harmed no one save those who were in arms against us. Having thus, to use a favourite phrase of the admiral's, singed the beard of His Majesty the King of Spain, we straightway demanded payment of 25,000 ducats as reward for our doings, and were as promptly paid the same, the dons having had enough of us and fearing worse things might befall them.

This treasure having been divided, we left San Domingo well pleased with ourselves and hoping that God might be still more gracious to us when we came to Nombre de Dios and the isthmus of Panama, whither we were bound.

As you may have heard, for what I write is now matter of history, the fleet never reached the mainland, for a most grievous fever which rages in these parts broke out aboard, and forced them to run to the northward to Florida and the colony in Virginia; but long before this, we of the *Water Sprite* were, as the saying is, upon our own hooks after having

been also on our beam ends for the better part of an hour, and this is how we left the fleet and took to cruising on our own account.

Two days had passed since we left San Domingo, and one half of the gentlemen aboard were gloating over their newly-acquired wealth, while the other half had taken to the dice and the wine bottle. As it was getting towards evening, the admiral's ship signalled for the fleet to shorten sail as there was sign of dirty weather. I could see nothing the matter, but Simon pointed out to me a curious streaked appearance of the sky, and the strange way in which it met the sea on the horizon, which he said boded us no good, and Master Rogers confirmed this, telling me that we were like to have what in these seas is known as a tornado, a circular storm of great violence, of the kind which rage chiefly in August and September, but now and again come at odd times and do great mischief, sending the stoutest crafts to the bottom, and on shore uprooting great trees and even tearing the roofs from houses. I was not best pleased to hear of this, and the crew were soon in as bad a humour as myself, for Captain Swan being in a temper at having lost five ducats at the dice, and swearing that he saw no cause for fear, would not let them shorten sail, and held on boldly till the wind dropped altogether and we lay ahead of the other ships, which had one and all obeyed the order of Sir Francis.

We lay there rolling on the swell, which had an oily look, and came and went under the ship's keel with a sullen gurgle as if in wrath. All this time it grew darker and darker, till even I who had scant knowledge of the sea could tell that something was about to happen; but Captain Swan, being mightily obstinate, swore he would put in irons the first man who as much as set foot upon the shrouds, and paid no attention even when the boom of a gun came over the water from the fore-deck of the *Bonaventure*.

As if the firing of the cannon was a signal for the storm to commence, a hot wind reached us of a sudden, and then away astern we saw a long line of white upon the sea, sweeping towards us, while a dull rushing sound reached our ears. At this the captain took fright at last, and gave his orders, but too late. We saw the gale and the broken water reach the rest of the fleet and noted how each ship staggered under

its fury and then sped away before it like frightened sea-fowl, and then with a shriek, as if fiends were in the air, the tornado burst upon us with a blackness as if of night.

It caught the unfurled sails and blew them from the bolt ropes with whip-like cracks, while the *Water Sprite* heeled over at the shock and lay upon her side, beaten down by the fury of the wind. Thus we lay for close upon an hour, and the mariners with hatchets in their hands stood ready to fell the masts, and cut away the standing rigging if we should heel over by a foot more, but by a merciful Providence two of the larger sails which, being of new canvas, had held fast, were split to ribbons by a furious gust, and the barque, righting slowly, bounded away before the blast, plunging and staggering, while the great waves raced after her, and their curling tops threatened ever and anon to come pouring down upon her stern. All night the storm raged, and long ere morning we were riding out the gale, fearing to run longer before it, lest we should be pooped, and I for one had given up all hope of seeing another day, for what with the wind whistling and moaning through the shrouds, the hissing rush and thud of the billows, the creak and rattle on board, and the quiver and shaking of the stout planks, I feared we should be overwhelmed and never heard tell of more.

By the mercy of God, howbeit, it calmed a little as the grey morning broke, though all the next day we lay with head to the wind-blasts, staggering up the great waves and reeling down into the hollows after a fashion which caused a most vile sensation of emptiness in the stomach.

All danger was passed by night, the sea having quieted and the wind fallen, though a mighty swell born of the turmoil began to set in, and we got sail spread and steered as best we might for the fleet which, for all we knew, might long since be resting at the bottom. But if the storm had calmed outside the ship it had increased within, for all hands were angered at the captain who, by his folly and disobedience of the admiral's orders, had brought us to this pass.

It was no wonder there was grumbling, for one ship had but little chance of spoil, and not a little of being taken by some of the great galleons of Spain. If the men could have had their way I verily believe they would have made Master Rogers captain, for he was ever cheery and reckoned by all

to be a good navigator, having had much experience both in the western seas and in the seas of Europe. It was not long ere Captain Swan made out what was passing in the minds of many on board, and he made matters worse by cursing and fuming, keeping the crew for ever at work, and not deigning to speak to Master Rogers, in whom he saw a likely rival.

It would have been hard to tell what might have happened, and for my part I would have sided with the crew ; but when matters were getting worse, our thoughts were turned into another channel, for one bright morning there came a hail from the look-out on the foremast—‘Sail ho, on the weather bow!’

CHAPTER XVIII

OF THE TAKING OF THE 'DONNA BELLA'

AT once everyone was eager for a look at the strange sail, and many were the surmises as to what she would prove to be, though all were agreed that she was more than likely to turn out a Spaniard unless, indeed, she was one of Sir Francis's fleet which, like the *Water Sprite*, had been blown out of her course. Whatever she was, it was soon evident she was drawing near, and the crew were set to work to bring up powder and shot, the guns were run out and the small arms got in readiness. In about an hour's time we could see that she was a three-masted ship with a great hull, and if she was an enemy she was like to prove a tough one, so that with such a prospect the crew grew cheery and whistled merrily as they slung up the powder buckets and stacked the round shot beside the cannon.

'Hocus pocus,' said the captain to Master Rogers, 'what think ye of her?'

'I judge her to be a Spaniard, mayhap from the mainland, and pray God choke full of silver ingots to her decks.'

'Hocus pocus, amen,' rejoined the captain, at which strange speech I could not keep myself from smiling, to his no small annoyance, as I could see; indeed, had he not been so excited about the approaching vessel, I verily believe he would have rated me soundly.

It was a fine sight to see the great ship drawing near, with every sail bulging out before the breeze, pressing slowly and steadily through the blue water, with the spray flying from her forefoot and a wake of snow-white foam streaming out behind her.

By this time we had hoisted our pennon, but she paid no notice, and came sweeping on in glorious fashion as if such

a thing as the barque *Water Sprite* was nothing to her, though we could see the figures of men on board gazing at us from over the bulwarks on the fore-deck, and clustered round the root of the bowsprit, and could note where the morning sunlight glinted on headpiece of steel or other armour. Then all of a sudden there came a blare of trumpets from her and the flag of Spain fluttered upon the breeze, while she yawed a little and let fly at us from one of her cannon. The shot skipped over the water far in front of the *Water Sprite*, and Simon, who was beside me, gave a snort of defiance.

'Tis like the fools,' said he, 'much bluster and little sense.'

'Hocus pocus,' roared the captain, 'this devil of a don is full of fight! We must get to weather of her, Master Rogers. Yeomen of the braces to your posts!'

And now occurred some most pretty manœuvring and much bellowing of orders and hocus-pocussing, till finally we outwitted the Spaniard and got the weather gauge of her. Then, ere we got broadside to her, Nat Watt, our old gunner, sent a shot flying through one of her sails, which tore a splinter out of her mainmast and caused much scurrying and confusion aboard her.

We were close to her now, and I gazed at her in wonder for I had never seen so great a ship. She was a huge galleon with a lofty poop which dipped sharply to the waist, and she carried great lanterns at the stern, while for a figure-head she had the face and bust of a woman most elegantly carved and painted in gay colours. Though pierced for many more, she showed twelve guns of a side, and was crowded with mariners and soldiers, while she ran up to her mastheads a dozen different flags bearing the devices of the knights and gentlemen aboard her. Her captain, a most gallant-looking man, sheathed in armour, stood upon her poop, and after we had fired he raised his plumed headpiece and bowed most courteously, whereat old Hocus did the same as best he could, though his bow was a trifle lacking in grace, and then, all the cannon being run to one side, he gave order to fire and to aim low.

With a roar which shook the whole barque, the broadside was poured into the Spaniard, sweeping her decks and knocking splinters from her hull and bulwarks. Next

moment she let fly at us with her twelve guns, but by reason of her great height the shot flew high, bringing down the foretopmast and cutting up the rigging. The crew of the *Water Sprite* swarmed aloft and set to work upon the damage, while the gunners, having reloaded, sent another iron hail aboard the Spaniard, doing even more mischief than before, and shrieks and groans came from her crowded decks. In a short time the fight was raging furiously and our top-hamper was cut to pieces, but scarce a man was struck, while our shot told most heavily on the great galleon, plunging into her huge hull, upsetting her cannon, and turning her decks into a shambles, for the breeze swept the smoke aside and our gunners could take good aim. For fully half-an-hour the battle continued in this fashion, and the crew, each man stripped to the waist, begrimed with powder, and sweating copiously, cheered and yelled, and shouted like men possessed, while the air was full of screeching and humming shot, splinters and musket bullets, for the two ships had drawn closer. These same bullets fired by marksmen in the Spaniard's tops soon began to do us no little damage, for first a man fell lifeless, shot through the head, and then three of the gunners were badly wounded. Moreover, the dons had depressed the muzzles of their great guns and the cannon balls began to play havoc among us, scattering death and splinters around, turning brave men into mere blood-stained heaps, and every now and then crashing into the hull.

Seeing that our only hope was to finish the fight as quickly as might be, old Hocus put his helm hard a-port and ran us into the Spaniard till we lay broadside to broadside, grinding and creaking, while the crews lashed the ships together.

With loud shouts the Spanish soldiers and mariners scrambled over the bulwarks and leapt down upon our decks in great force, and so fierce was their attack that they drove one half of us back upon the poop and the other half upon the fore-deck, and it looked as if they would overcome us by reason of their numbers. But happily for the *Water Sprite*, Simon Grisel had been in such a fix before, and shouting for me to help him, he ran to the side and began hacking at the lashings with a heavy sword. As he did so, I stood by him with a pistol, and fired at the men above us

on the galleon's poop who would have hindered him. At the same moment Master Rogers, who was on the fore-deck, cut the lashings at the bow with a hatchet, and ere the dons on the *Water Sprite* knew what had happened, the ships had drifted apart and a dozen Spaniards who were leaping to gain the deck gained the sea instead, and half of them a watery grave.

Then with a great cheer we closed upon the others and a fearful battle began.

With bill and hanger, pistol, pike and rapier, crew fought crew, till the red blood ran in streams in the scuppers, and a pile of dead lay upon the deck, while oaths and curses, yells and groans filled the air, and once more the round shot from the galleon came crashing aboard, striking down Englishmen and Spaniards alike. Good luck! within five minutes' time I had slain three men and come within an ace of being killed, while I was stained with blood and wounded on the head by a splinter. I saw Simon hurl a don fairly overboard, and heard old Hocus shouting his war-cry and saw him do more than one doughty deed, for he was, despite his faults, as fierce a fire-eater as one might wish to see.

Step by step we forced the Spaniards back, and one by one we struck them down or thrust them into the sea, till nothing was left of them save a ring of desperate and weary men gathered round the mainmast, a ring bristling with long pikes and swords. For a moment the whole ship's company, of whom there were not more than forty left, paused and gazed at this circle of doomed men, then with a hoarse shout they closed upon them fore and aft, there came a ring of metal, a chorus of wild cries and groans, the thud of weapons as they struck home, and then there was not a Spaniard left alive aboard the *Water Sprite* save a few wounded wretches who littered the deck and prayed for water, or gasped and writhed in pain. But there was no time to look to these, for the fight was not yet over and the battle fury was come upon us all.

The gunners rushed to the cannons and opened fire once more upon the galleon, and then to our wonderment we saw her crowd all sail and begin to gather way, for she had lost a third of her company and was not minded to lose more.

'Hocus pocus,' roared Captain Swan, 'twenty ducats to

the man who cripples her,' but ere he had done speaking, Simon had trained a gun upon her, and the shot from it hurtled into her mainmast, and, aided by the press of sail, brought it, and with it the foretopmast, crashing by the board, killing or wounding half-a-score of men. 'Bravo!' yelled the captain, forgetting in his excitement even to hocus pocus. 'Now for them, my sea-dogs, and hurrah for the ingots and Queen Bess!'

'Hurrah!' shouted the crew, thinking more of the ingots, I warrant, and as we ran alongside of the unwieldy and dismantled galleon they swarmed up her lofty sides like cats, caring nothing for pike-thrusts or pistol-shots, and so gained her decks. With them went Simon and myself, and I can remember how, as I gained the poop, I stood and looked forward in wonder at the vast sweep of her waist and fore-deck—the former littered with the wreck of the mainmast, the latter the scene of a fierce conflict, for we had boarded the galleon fore and aft. I had little time left for wonder, howbeit, and was soon at work again thrusting and parrying a multitude of blows which were aimed at me, shouting and cheering with the rest, and stopping only to wipe away the blood which ran down into my eyes from the splinter wound. For a time the Spaniards fought like fiends, but at last they began to give way before the fierce onslaught made upon them, and taken front and rear were driven from point to point, till finally those who remained took refuge below.

Having awed the prisoners by pointing a cannon down each of the hatchways, we had time to look about us, and found ourselves master of the galleon *Donna Bella*, of one thousand tons burthen, carrying in all four-and-twenty guns, of which a dozen were of brass—though many had been rendered useless by the fire of the *Water Sprite*. She had sailed over a week before from Nombre de Dios with a company of a hundred and seventy all told, of whom one hundred were now dead or wounded, and the remainder were prisoners below. They were brought up in batches to be bound, and from some of them we learnt that she was indeed a lucky capture, for she had on board much treasure brought over the isthmus from Panama.

She had been bound for Cadiz when she fell in with us,

and her captain, Don Diego de Valdez—who had been slain in the fight—had, against the wish of most on board, resolved to give us battle, being a most gallant soldier though but little of a mariner. As you may suppose, we were much elated at our success, and after the wounded in both ships had been seen to, the decks flushed and swabbed, and the dead thrown overboard, all the crew who could be spared were set to work upon the wreck of the mainmast, and the making of a mast to replace that which had been shot away. Captain Swan had resolved to shift with the greater part of the crew on board the galleon, as she was a roomy ship and could hold the prisoners well, and he placed Master Rogers in command of the *Water Sprite*. It was found, however, that the latter had received one shot between wind and water, and was leaking badly, so that it was needful for her to sail for land as quickly as might be. Nevertheless, none of the crew would sail in her till some of the treasure had been transferred to her hold, and a merry time we had of it, shifting boxes filled with bars of silver, ducats, and holy images with precious stones set in them. The two ships lay close to each other all night, and the pumps were kept agoing on board the *Water Sprite*, while, as the moon gave good light, the men were busy repairing ropes and spars. All being in readiness, the next morning old Hocus read out a list of twelve who were to sail in the barque. I was not a little surprised to find that while I was to go, Simon was destined to remain on the galleon; but when I made representation of this to the captain, he bade me hold my peace, as Simon had proved himself so good a gunner that the *Donna Bella* could not do without him.

At this I stormed and raved in anger, but could do nothing else, albeit Master Rogers put in a word for me, though the crew being in good spirits cared not a whit for my grievance. Simon himself said nothing, for he knew as well as I that old Hocus was but wreaking his spite upon me, knowing that I had no grounds for protest, as I had not taken Simon into my service and paid him no wage. There was nothing left for it then but to give the faithful fellow a hearty hand-clasp and wish him God-speed, and to trust that we might meet again ere long at Nombre de Dios, though little did

either of us think where and in what manner we were to renew our comradeship.

Shortly thereafter the *Water Sprite* was speeding to the eastward, bound once more for San Domingo, with a small company on board, to wit, Captain Rogers, Sir Jaspar Loveday, who, as he said, had come with us, 'being a great friend of Master Rogers and hating old Hocus Pocus as he hated the devil,' Master Harry Trelawney, who, though but a lad, was yet a most comely gentleman and a brave one, as you shall see, my humble self, an under officer, one carpenter, four mariners and a boy.

God knows this was but a scanty crew, yet more could not be spared, as it needed all the twenty and odd men aboard the *Donna Bella* to look after the prisoners and keep the great galleon in trim. For all that, I would have been merry enough, my wound being in a fair way to heal, and the talk of Sir Jaspar being mightily diverting, had Simon not been left behind, for I had grown very fond of the old soldier with his queer tales and queerer ways, and missed his company more than I had thought possible.

Nevertheless, as Captain Rogers put it, 'there was no use crying after spilled ale,' and though I felt downhearted for some few hours, yet, by dinner-time, I could laugh as loud as any at Sir Jaspar's witticisms. This Sir Jaspar had been a gallant at Court and somewhat of a roving blade, but having slain a man in some duel about a lady-in-waiting, he had raised a blood feud against him, and deemed it wiser to make the seas his home for a brief space. He had as many airs and graces as any fine dame, besides little tricks of manner, and a most elegant fashion of blowing his nose, such I have seen in no other, for he was wont to give a curious flourish to his kerchief and make a most genteel sound which I have even tried to imitate but without avail. He was so proud of this, that, as I live, he would blow his nose without cause twenty times in an hour, as if he had been taken with a cold in the head, and he had a very fine selection of gay-coloured kerchiefs which, when not in use, he wore round his neck one above another, for he had no ruff; till, what with his gay clothes and rouged cheeks, at a distance he was like a bright-plumaged bird such as one sees in the woods of Trinidad. Moreover, he used a pleasant-smelling grease of his own pre-

paring, wherewith to anoint his moustachios, which was very long and fair in colour. He was an admirable mimic, so that he kept us roaring with laughter, as he hocussed-pocussed, and fussed and fumed like the former captain of the *Water Sprite*.

For our diversion he would mimic others also—Sir Philip Sidney, Raleigh, Leicester, and many such worthies whom he had known at Court, where I fear he must have been looked upon as somewhat of a buffoon, though he could write most excellent verses and tell a story with much spirit and merriness.

We were able to dine with some pleasure, for a sail well oiled had been dragged over the shot-hole, and thus the pumps had not ever to be kept clanging, which was comforting, as they make a most vile noise and remind one overmuch of the frailty of any craft. There were but the four of us at the table, and it makes me sad when I think of these worthy comrades laughing and jesting with each other and with me; though truly there was little cause for merriment, as in a leaky, under-manned craft we ploughed our way through the Carib Sea for San Domingo.

Of Sir Jaspar I have already made mention, save only that I did not say, he was short in stature and of a slight build, for as he was, wont to say 'if an article be elegant it matters not though it be small,' and he ever made a point of asking me if I did not agree with him, to the great amusement of the company.

Master Rogers, who was now captain, was in nowise like him, for though of middle height, yet he was very broad and thick-set, albeit I could have spared him a few inches. He had a close-cropped beard, a cheery face, and a lively manner, and was, I well knew, a most skilled mariner, besides being of good family and a very excellent shot with pistol or musketoon.

Master Trelawney was, I have said, but a lad; yet he was, as far as height goes, the tallest of us all, being a big Cornishman with a ruddy, beardless face and a merry laugh, giving promise of great strength in years to come,—as regards body, I mean—though for that matter his laugh might have increased as well, had not—but I am fore-reaching again.

This was his first voyage, for he was a younger son and had been shipped off to make his fortune, or die of fever, if the Spaniards did not finish him, yet he was as merry as

a boy upon a fair day, and marvelled mightily at Sir Jasper's tales of life at Court, tavern brawls, affairs with the town watch and others of less repute.

'Sdeath, gentlemen,' said this worthy, 'methinks I have been ill-named, for I have ever loved the night better than the day, though why I cannot tell.'

'I doubt me t'is because your works are evil,' quoted Captain Rogers.

'Go to, Jack, go to, you will put Master Harry there to the blush, while our friend of the squat frame will have naught more to say to me; but, Jack, would it not be well for us an we fell in with some well-laden Spanish ship which we might serve as we did the galleon, on the poop of which now stands our worthy Hocus Pocus? This to his health.'

'God forbid!' said the captain, 'for the serving is likely to be on the other side. Why, man, what could we do against a ship's company?'

'Well, well, who knows! our friend Master Clephane there is worth three men of proper stature, while Master Harry is equal to a couple, and I warrant, captain, you and I could hold our own with any twain.'

He said this so funnily, and blew his nose in such a fashion, that we could not forbear laughing at him, at which he was by no means displeased and even seemed flattered, and then he fell to showing us his ideas for the taking of ships, which consisted for the most part in night attacks and setting kegs of powder floating under their sides, by the igniting of which the vessel might be blown into the air, and such like follies, which served, however, to pass the time and keep us in good humour, though he would have us argue with him as if he talked of weighty matters and knew himself in the right. For two days we headed to the north and east, and on the third day made the western coast of the island, and with much labour ran the vessel partly out of the water, and careened her till we could reach the shot-hole. Then we set to work, under direction of the carpenter, and first scraping her, after two days' work we got the plank mended and the ship made watertight.

The place where we had beached her was a sandy bay between rock reefs, well sheltered and well hidden, so that

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we had no fear in the lighting of fires and shooting what came within our reach.

Though the woods came close down to the shore and were very dense and dark, there were few animals to be seen, and we shot nothing larger than a sharp-snouted quadruped no bigger than a rabbit and somewhat like one in colour.

There were a few birds resembling pigeons, and turtles and crabs were plentiful, so that we had some variety in our diet. Sir Jaspar, who was a clever cook, made us a very pleasant soup, which was indeed half a stew, being full of pieces of flesh and fowl, and flavoured with spices from aboard the ship.

We saw nothing of any inhabitants, and after putting the barque in order and floating her into deep water we spent another day in laying by a stock of fish, there being plenty of divers kinds to be caught from the rocks. Having cleaned them, we dried them in the sun so that they might keep well, and soon had a goodly store of them aboard. Sir Jaspar had wandered off upon his own account to find something to shoot in the woods, but though we heard the sound of his gun he did not appear at the time fixed for sailing, and we began to wonder if any mishap had befallen him.

When a full hour had passed our wonder changed to fear, and leaving one of the mariners and the boy on board the ship, we armed ourselves and prepared to go in search of the missing knight.

CHAPTER XIX

OF THE ORDER TO FIRE, AND THE ENDING OF THE 'WATER SPRITE'

ERE we had reached the edge of the woods, however, the missing knight was missing no longer, for Sir Jaspar, flushed and heated, hatless and dishevelled, came in sight, his clothes torn and face and hands scratched. We ran to meet him and plied him with questions, but he was so breathless that we had to wait for a space of full five minutes before he could tell us the cause of his strange appearance.

'So you thought I was lost,' he said at last. 'Well, my friends, I came near being lost for ever, and we must make haste if you would stop as vile a piece of devilry and cruelty as I have ever seen or heard tell of; but we have need of care and must surprise the Spaniards.'

'Spaniards!' we cried.

'Yes, Spaniards, five-and-twenty of the dogs, but as we go I will tell you the tale.'

'Guided by Sir Jaspar, we plunged into the dense woods, and as we struggled through the thick undergrowth, having in places to cut our way with the hatchet, he told us of the adventure which had befallen him and what he had seen. It seemed that, some distance from the outskirts of the wood, he had come upon a herd of wild pigs and had shot at and wounded a boar, no doubt the leader and patriarch of the herd. It had separated from the others, and Sir Jaspar, carried away by the excitement of the chase, had scrambled after it as best he could, tracking it by the trail of blood which it left behind, for it was hard hit. He must have followed it for the better part of a mile, or even more, when, entering a kind of glade in the wood, he had come upon it

lying down and rooting at the earth in its pain and rage. Ere he could fire his musket again, it rushed at him furiously, squealing and grunting with foam and blood upon its tusks, and there was nothing left for him but to seek safety in a great tree close at hand. As it was, he had just time to get out of the brute's way, and found himself a prisoner, with the boar as guard and jailor. He could see, however, that he had wounded it in such a fashion that its strength was fast ebbing away, and that he would not be a prisoner long; but in the meanwhile, being in the tree, he thought fit to take a view from it, and for this purpose scrambled upwards, finding his way made easy by the many creepers and climbing plants which festooned this giant of the woods. He was in a mortal fear lest a lurking snake should bite him, but he encountered none, and soon was seated in a fork of the great tree, gazing round about him and mightily pleased with the prospect. All about and below him were the forest trees, some with broad, some with narrow leaves, a few bright with gay blossoms, but all strange and marvellous to his eyes, and far away rose great verdure-clad mountains stretching northwards.

He had but little time to gaze at them, however, for his eye caught the gleam of water at some distance, and he soon saw that he had discovered a small lake, or, as it is there called, a lagoon, which nestled in the midst of the dense woods. Moreover, on the further shore of it, he saw to his surprise a little group of huts close to the water's edge and people moving about near them, while some seemed to be fishing in the lagoon, though he was too far off to be certain of this. Being of an inquiring mind, he was mightily pleased at his discovery, and sat watching the natives, who lit a fire, and, as far as he could see, made preparation for cooking, while those upon the water began to paddle shorewards. He was so interested in the watching of this little colony that he forgot how time was passing, and only remembered that he might be left behind when he noticed that the squealing and grunting at the foot of the tree had ceased, and judged thereby that the boar was either dead or had raised the siege.

He was then about to descend when his eye caught the glint of something in the sunlight moving through the woods

which fringed a little stream that ran into the lagoon, and which, from his airy perch, he could follow for some distance.

A second glance convinced him that this glint of light was neither more nor less than the gleam of armour, and the thought of Spaniards, and what he had heard of their doings in the island, made him keep to his post and renew his look-out with the keenness of a hawk. For a time he could see nothing, but at last, at a part of the wood where the trees grew sparsely, a couple of men appeared and began to cross the open space. Though they must have been over half a mile away, yet there was no doubt as to what they were. Their steel caps and jackets, pikes and muskets, proclaimed them soldiers, and there could be no other soldiers there than those of Spain, and following close upon them came other two and then another pair, and so on, two dozen in all, and one officer, as Sir Jaspar could tell by his carrying no musket and keeping in the rear of the others. But a narrow belt of forest separated them from the peaceful little colony which, all unconscious of their approach, was gathering for the mid-day meal. Sir Jaspar had no doubt as to the purpose of the Spaniards, for when we had landed at San Domingo we had heard blood-curdling tales of their cruelty to both Indians and negroes. Indeed, since the discovery of the island, the former had been steadily decreasing in numbers, and had been driven to take refuge in the wildest parts. Therefore he did not hesitate for a moment, but swung himself down from his perch, and finding the boar had given up the ghost by virtue of his bullet, he lost no time in reaching the bay where lay the *Water Sprite*, though much distressed by the heat and the denseness and gloom of the forest.

As you may suppose, we were not a little excited at this news, and hurried on as fast as might be, now making good progress, now tripping or stumbling over a fallen log or some strong creeper which, snake-like crossed our path. For my part, I wondered how Sir Jaspar had managed to make such good pursuit as to come up with the boar, but I took note that he was the most nimble of the whole of us, jumping hither and thither in the most lively fashion, and bringing to my mind the springs of a grasshopper. After having advanced a good mile into the wood, we halted for a moment to win back our breaths and wipe the sweat from our fore-

heads, but a sound as if a musket had been fired, and then another, and yet another, set us scurrying on again, nor did we pause till, more by good luck than good guidance, we reached one end of the lagoon, a little stretch of water some half mile in length, and a few hundred yards across. A small stream, the further part of the one Sir Jaspar had seen from the tree, ran out of it, and this, as it was shallow, we crossed with ease and hurried on, for during our brief halt we had seen, through the fringe of bushes which concealed us, a sight that made our blood boil. We had seen the little cluster of huts and gardens on the shore of the lagoon, and the small dug-out boats drawn up at the water's edge; but we had seen more, for there were dark objects stretched upon the ground, and one of the huts was ablaze, the smoke rising from it above the belt of scrub and palm trees which lay beyond the village. The Spanish soldiery were to be seen here and there, going and coming from the huts, and we could even hear their shouts and laughter as they rifled and looted them to their heart's content. All this was bad enough, but what sent us hurrying on our way in mad haste was the sight of that which told us that the devilish work was not yet finished, and that we were yet in time to spoil, in part, at least, the Spaniards' game.

Fastened together was a little crowd of the Indians, and even at that distance we could see they were women and children, and every now and then a low wail would come from them, or at times a shriek as one of the brutal soldiery struck or maltreated them.

These were gathered in front of the huts, beyond which was a broad stretch of shore, and we could note a line of some dozen tall palms, very pretty and graceful to see, with their slender, light-coloured stems and feathery tops. They looked as if they had been planted by the hand of man, for they stood between the scrub and the water's edge, though nearer the former. To the stem of each the figure of a man was fastened, and Master Rogers, who knew the ways of Spaniards, cursed softly below his breath.

'What is't?' asked Sir Jaspar.

'They will make targets of these men presently,' said Master Rogers.

'God forbid! we shall be there before that, and may I

be roasted an we do not make other targets. Come on quickly !'

'Stay a moment,' said I, 'we have no plan.'

'Right, oh, most cautious Scot !' answered Sir Jaspar, 'but a rush will do't methinks. We are but ten men, yet they will be taken wholly by surprise.'

'You forget,' I said, 'we can afford to loose none of the ten.'

'True, but have you a better plan ?'

'Well, look you, may we not come upon them from the other side of the village, and post ourselves in the undergrowth, opposite those spaces between the palms ? Then I warrant the firing will be in a somewhat curious fashion, and should puzzle the yellow skins, as Simon calls them.'

'By my head,' said Sir Jaspar, your brains are far from squat, whatever your body may be. 'Tis a most pretty plan. What say you, Master Rogers ?'

'I know of none better.'

'And you, Master Trelawney ?'

'The sooner we are there the better,' quoth the Cornishman.

Next moment we were at it again, skirting the side of the lagoon and keeping well under cover of the trees and bushes, though near the margin of the forest, till we got close to the huts.

Then we plunged deeper into the woods, and making a half circuit, at last reached the edge of the forest again, behind the line of palms. Very gently we crept to the margin and looked out through the leafy screen, five of us being opposite one space between the palms, and five opposite another.

We were quite close to them, and could catch a glimpse of the brown, coppery-skinned Indians who were fastened by thin cords run round their bodies and the tree stems.

Moreover, we could see the band of women and children with their Spanish guard, and I marvelled to see how beautiful many of the women were, despite their colour, their eyes being large and soft as a deer's and their dark hair most luxuriant. They were simply clad, and numbered nearly twenty, while the children were without clothing, and there were but few of them ; but both women and children were a piteous sight, the former weeping, the latter whimpering a little and looking around them in terror.



VERY GENTLY WE CREPT TO THE MARGIN AND LOOKED THROUGH THE LEAFY SCREEN

Some ten men, as far as we could tell, had been slain by the dons, and their bodies lay as they had fallen, stripped of whatever ornaments they might have worn, some cut and hacked in a manner which made me long to have a grip of the Spaniards' throats, that I might serve the brutes as I had served Ned Saltcombe, only more so. The dons themselves were scattered about here and there, some still rifling the huts, others guarding the prisoners, and yet others stretched out at their ease, smoking, talking and laughing as if well pleased with their day's work. They were fierce and cruel-looking men, clad in armour, as Sir Jasper had told us, with pikes and muskets as weapons. They were black bearded and yellow skinned, for the most part of middle stature, not broad built, but very wiry looking and much tanned by the hot sun.

They must have taken the little village completely by surprise, for only two of them were wounded as far as we could see, and we counted five-and-twenty, including their leader, the heaviest-built man among them, with a fat, sensuous face, thick lips, and, methought, a trace of the negro in him.

Clearly they knew nothing of our presence, and we watched them gather together and eat the meal of cakes and fish the poor Indians had prepared, jesting with each other and drinking deeply of the wine each man carried in a leathern bottle. We would have fired upon them there and then had they not been so far off, but we knew that, were we to win, every shot must tell; therefore we bided our time and lay low, talking in whispers and chuckling to ourselves at the thought that there was no need for many of these Spaniards to make so good a meal. They were a long time over it, but we waited patiently, and Sir Jasper, who knew Spanish well, could now and then catch the drift of their talk, and told us they would shoot the Indians after they had made an end of eating. And sure enough this was their intention, for, at an order from the commandant, six of the villains, posted themselves twenty paces in front of one of the bound men, and other six did the same before a second, beginning with the Indian nearest the huts and opposite that part of the wood where we lay concealed. We noted this with joy, for it did away with the risk of our being discovered, as might have been the case if we had been forced to move.

We were well pleased also to see the rest, save two, who guarded the women and children, group themselves together to view the sport in a way most convenient for shooting at them, and we watched eagerly for the signal which was to be the order for the Spaniards to fire, as we were not minded to let them have a chance of hitting us.

I can close my eyes and see it all again.

Our little party lying in two companies at the margin of the forest, the palms in front of us with the bands encircling each poor captive passing round their stems. Beyond these the firing-parties and the Spanish soldiery outlined against the still waters of the lagoon, the huts, one of which was still smoking, a shapeless mass of ruins, the poor women and children, and beyond all, the great tropical forest, lying still and calm, bathed in the noon-day heat.

It was a strange sight, and I have seen many strange ones, but few to match it, yet I had not long to crouch gazing at it, for there came the quick, sharp word of command,—

‘Un, Dos, Tres, Tirar!’

The last part of the order was drowned in the crack and rattle of our muskets as we poured in a most deadly fire upon the dons. Three of the villains leaped into the air and fell forward on their faces, while others spun round, crying aloud and throwing up their arms; and when the smoke had cleared we could see eight of them lying on the ground, five still and quiet, the others twisting about in agony, moaning and cursing.

The rest were so horror-struck and so utterly taken by surprise that they stood gazing stupidly at their fallen comrades and those of us who had pistols, or who had reloaded quickly, poured in a second volley, which put three more of them *hors de combat* as the French say.

Then with swords drawn and muskets clubbed we rushed out upon them, ten to thirteen, but ere they had quite recovered their wits, four more of them had no power of recovering wits or aught else. The two men guarding the women and children joined in the fray, and to do the Spaniards justice, they fought bravely awhile, and their leader would have made an end of Sir Jaspar had I not run him through in the nick of time; and it was wonderful to note the surprise on his face as he felt the point of my rapier between

his ribs. When he had fallen the others lost heart and sought to fly, but we feared to let any escape, not knowing but that a larger body of troops might be within reach of a fugitive, and therefore we did our work grimly and well, and finished it in the waters of the lagoon, the last two of the Spaniards having tried to escape by swimming; but we overtook them in the shallow water, and there they died like men, with weapons in their hands and their faces to the foe; and this I will say, that, for the most part, the Spanish soldier is no coward, albeit he has the hardest heart God has placed in man.

When all was over we found that we had not gone unscathed, for young Trelawney, when crushing one of the don's heads, steel cap, skull and all, by a fearful blow with his musket butt, had received a flesh wound in the side; David Skipness, one of the mariners, had been slain outright by a pike thrust, and three others of them had been wounded, happily none severely. Four of the Spaniards were but wounded, and we were in doubt as to what we should do with them as they lay upon the blood-stained ground, two quiet enough, but the others cursing and striving to get at us. Our doubts were soon solved, however, for Sir Jaspas, having without thought loosed two of the Indians, the poor creatures threw themselves upon the Spaniards in a fury, and made an end of them before our eyes, and I cannot say we were over sorry for it when we thought how the Indians had been served. When we loosed the others and set free the women and children their joy was pitiful to see. They knelt before us and kissed our feet, they picked up their little goods which the Spaniards had scattered broadcast, and would have us take them. They shouted and danced and threw mud upon the dead dons, all save a few who sat them down by the bodies of the slain, and made lamentation in a curious, wailing fashion most plaintive and melancholy.

Then Sir Jaspas, who ever loved display, made them a speech in Spanish, to the effect that they had better fly to some other part of the island with all speed, and gave them much good advice and knowledge as to England and Queen Bess, and then set them to work to bury the dead, though we ourselves buried poor Skipness at the base of the tallest

palm, and little did we think that he was to be accounted lucky at having met his death on a pike end, swiftly and surely in the heat of battle.

Then, having partaken of fish and cakes, we took with us the best of the Spanish weapons, and left the others with the Indians, to their great joy, though they seemed to be a contented, peace-loving folk ; but cruelty will make a worm turn in the long run. An hour or so afterwards, having taken a slice or two from the boar's haunch, we were aboard the *Water Sprite* again, drawing gently out of the bay, and I call to mind that the cool sea breeze was very pleasing to us after the glare and heat of the sun, and the fierce fight on the shores of the lagoon, which, indeed, I could scarce believe had taken place.

That night we held a council as to what we should now do, for we were in doubt whether or not to make for the mainland. There were but seven of us could work or fight, though, to be sure, there was every prospect of the wounded men being soon fit for duty. In the end, however, we resolved to shape a course for *Nombre de Dios*, trusting there to find the English fleet and the *Donna Bella*.

Two days passed without misadventure, and the wounded men, all save one, were themselves again, while we were sailing on a peaceful sea of the deepest blue, which reflected all the glory of the vault above, and I spent my time in lying at the prow watching the cut-water sheer through the tiny wave-tops, and watching how the bluff bows of the stout old barque buffeted the little billows, bursting them into clouds of spray, tinged rainbow colours by the sunlight.

Captain Rogers was of opinion that we would soon reach the mainland, and I began to hanker after the fruits of these parts, for they are grateful in the heat if nothing else ; but on the morning of the third day, a man who had gone aloft hailed the deck to the effect that there was a sail to the northward of us.

Captain Rogers looked ill pleased at this and mounted to the fore-top himself, but he descended shortly afterwards, looking glum and anxious.

'Whatever she is,' he said, 'she is sailing fast, and I have my doubts of her, for there are six Spanish ships to every one of England's in these waters, and the vessel to the

northward is a tall one and rising quickly into view,' and he gave orders to alter the course of the *Water Sprite* to the southward, so as to place the stranger astern.

'Can we not manage more speed out of the barque?' I asked.

'I would to God we could,' he answered, 'but she is as slow as a snail in a wind like this, and no wonder, for her bows are like a duck's breast and her stern as square as a Dutchman's.'

An hour passed, and I could see the stranger's topsail from the deck.

'She has seen us,' said Captain Rogers, 'and means to have a look at us.'

'Think you we can take her?' asked Sir Jaspar.

'Take her! She is like to prove a great galleon as full of men as the *Donna Bella*, that is, if she be a Spaniard, but time will show.'

The hours passed, and the stranger drew closer and yet closer; a great two-masted ship, not as large as the galleon we had taken, but with a vast spread of canvas, and, as we feared, a Spaniard. Every sail that could be set was crowded on the *Water Sprite*, they were drenched with brine and drew well, bulging out their snowy breasts before the breeze, but it was no use, as we could well see.

Still, as the saying goes, 'a stern chase is a long one,' and we hoped against hope that something might help us to escape. It was a strange feeling, this of being pursued by an enemy, and being able to do naught by way of rescue, and I stood and looked at the galleon, which came sweeping after us at a wonderful rate of speed for such a heavy and unwieldy craft; and Spaniard though she was, I could not help admiring her spread of sail gleaming white in the morning light, and the stately way she heeled over and foamed through the waters as the breeze struck her.

'It is all up with us in this race,' said Captain Rogers, sadly.

'I fear she is too strong to fight with a view to capture,' said Sir Jaspar, cheerily, 'but might we not carry away some of her spars?'

'It is for you to say, gentlemen, for should we fail, and then be taken, they will show us scant mercy for having fired at her, but I long to try it.'

'Then do so,' we all three cried, for we were not minded to douse our colours to the big Spaniard without a blow.

One of the larger cannon was brought astern, trained carefully upon her, and fired by Captain Rogers himself.

The ball skipped over the waters, and passed a few yards in front of the galleon's bow, but a second shot hulled her badly, and we raised a cheer as we saw the white streak left upon her black side.

'Now for it,' said Captain Rogers, as the galleon yawed and fired two guns on her fore-deck. One of the shots went screeching harmlessly between our masts, but the second, as ill luck would have it, brought our maintopmast down by the run, and it was the Spaniards' turn to cheer.

The galleon swept up broadside to us, and a voice summoned us to surrender, but we let drive at her from three cannon, and did her some damage. Scarce had the smoke cleared, however, when she poured a terrible fire into us. It swept across us and left the *Water Sprite* a helpless wreck, her masts shot away, her guns clogged and useless, and her decks cumbered with sails and rigging, though, strange to say, not a man was hurt, for Captain Rogers had bidden us all lie down behind the bulwarks.

Further resistance was hopeless, and I heard the good captain groan as a boat was lowered from the galleon, and a company of pikemen and soldiers with two officers got into her and shoved off.

'If I had but twenty more men, Jeremy,' he said, 'we would lead them a dance, but as it is—' He sighed, and turning on his heel, walked to meet the dons who were clambering up the side. When they saw how few of us were on the deck they feared an ambushade, and Sir Jasper had to set their minds at rest, otherwise I verily believe they would have bundled into their boat again. As it was, *we* were soon lowered into her and taken to the galleon, which was crowded with mariners and soldiers gazing at us from over the bulwarks and from the shrouds.

Her captain, a sour-visaged man with a yellowish hue in what should have been the whites of his eyes, and a wrinkled and blotched face, received us in no very gracious fashion, and cut Sir Jasper short as he entered upon a speech with much nose blowing and bowing. We were

stripped of our armour, bound and hurried below amidst the jeers of the Spaniards, and when an hour had passed, during which, no doubt, the treasure on board the gallant old barque passed into the hold of the galleon, we heard a roar, and the great ship shook as if from an earthquake. Then came a dead silence, followed by a yell from the deck above, and we knew that there was an ending of the good ship *Water Sprite*.

CHAPTER XX

OF OUR LADY THE VIRGIN, AND THE GATHERING OF THE SHARKS

IT was a dark and dirty hole into which we had been roughly pushed, and we sat and wondered what would happen to us next, while Sir Jaspar must have been the most miserable of us all, his hands being tied and his nose, in consequence, unblowable, which was a sad calamity, as he was always most cheery when indulging to the full in his little tricks and oddities ; and God knows we had need of cheering. We could tell that the galleon was underway again, and could faintly hear the noises from her deck, but a fearful stench from the bilge water turned us sick and ill, and we were glad when our prison door was thrown open and we were ordered on deck. With as merry a look as we could muster, we obeyed the summons and found ourselves on the poop of the galleon, with a guard of pikemen behind us, and a gay group of dons in front. The Spanish captain was there, no longer in armour, as when we had first seen him, but dressed in a suit of dark red velvet, with a heavy chain about his neck and a huge ruff, which made him look for all the world like a pouter pigeon, and a mighty ugly one to boot.

On one side of him stood a tall man with a handsome face, pale for a Spaniard, and most courteous looking. He was very plainly dressed in black and wore no ornament, and in my own mind I contrasted him to his favour with the Captain of the *San Fernando*, as the galleon was named.

But when I looked at the man who stood upon his other side, I felt a shiver run through me, though why, I could not tell. He was a priest, tall and gaunt, clad in a long robe fastened round his narrow waist with a piece of common

rope. A black hood was drawn over his head, but did not conceal his face, which thrilled me with a nameless dread. It was oval in shape, dark complexioned and not ill looking, but the horror of it lay in its leanness and hungry look, in the wild, burning light of his piercing eyes, from which the sockets seemed to have shrunk, and which, for some reason or other, called to my mind the stalked eyes of a lobster. The skin was drawn over the face bones so tightly that one could almost fancy it clothed a bare skull from which the flesh had long since rotted.

Although I shivered as I looked at him, he fascinated me as a serpent does a bird, and his thin lips formed the shadow of a smile as he turned and stared me in the face.

With an effort I gazed away from him, and then my blood seemed to chill in my veins and my skin to creep, for in the group of men who stood behind the captain, the soldier in black and the priest, was a man I knew, a man with a strawberry mark upon his face, the man I had seen in the thicket between Exeter and Plymouth.

He had not noticed me yet, as far as I could tell, for he was laughing and talking to a fat man who stood beside him, and nodding towards Sir Jaspar, who stood upon my right. I knew he must ere long see me, and for my own sake and my comrades' I felt a fear of what might follow. I would have covered my face had my hands been free ; as it was, I waited and felt my heart thumping against my ribs as a bird beats itself upon the cage bars.

As I had feared, he shifted his gaze from the little knight, and it lit on me. He started and craned his neck forwards to see me better, for the priest's form hid me a little, and then he sucked in his cheeks and his face twitched while he touched his companion on the arm and drew his attention to me, whispering into his ear as he did so. The fat man looked at me, and his eyes grew big with surprise ; then he said something to my enemy, for so I deemed him, and they both laughed, but silently, while I felt that my fate was sealed.

By this time the captain had asked if any among us spoke Spanish, and on Sir Jaspar bowing low, he bade him tell our tale, whence we had come, and whither we were going.

Sir Jaspar having plucked up his courage and being him-

self again, swore he would tell nothing till his hands were set free ; and seeing he could do no harm, his wish was granted.

The worthy knight at once unwound a scarlet kerchief from his neck and used it with much effect, to the no small amusement of all save the priest, who stood like a statue, nothing moving, save his eyes, which roamed over us, and to my mind seemed to gloat over us as though we were food for him. Having sounded his nose, Sir Jaspar stepped forward a little and made a most noble speech of great length, which, as far as I could gather, was as full of lies as I was of fears, for he set forth that we were upon a private venture and had lost many of our crew from sickness. Moreover he said that one was still suffering, and here he pointed to the wounded man who, misunderstanding him, bared his shoulder and showed the line of a great gash upon it, at which the captain of the *San Fernando* frowned and said something to the man on his left, while again the faint flicker of a smile came and went upon the face of the priest.

Thereafter they brought some of the treasure and the weapons we had taken from the Spaniards and had not had time to throw overboard, and showed them to Sir Jaspar, and he, smiling calmly, made up a tale for each with a most ready wit ; but I groaned when I noted that these stories did not tally in all points with the first, and marked the priest smile again.

I cursed Sir Jaspar inwardly for his folly, as, though I judged that I was doomed, he seemed bent on putting the halter about his own and his comrades' neck, for there was no mercy in the face of the priest, or in that of the captain of the *San Fernando*.

Sir Jaspar finished at last, bowed low, and stood twisting the well-greased ends of his moustachios, looking well pleased with himself, as was ever his way when he had a chance of speaking, no matter on what subject, or in what company.

'Well, father,' said the captain, in Spanish, 'what say you to this pretty tale?'

'The heretic lies,' said the priest, in a low, deep voice. 'God has delivered these men into our hands, and Holy Church shall deal with them. But I would speak with you in private, Señor Capitan.'

'Very good,' answered the captain, 'and Don Gomez, we pray your company in the cabin.'

The priest scowled at this, but said nothing, and having given an order to the pikeman, the captain was turning away when the man with the strawberry mark touched him gently on the sleeve, and then took him apart a little and spoke with him in whispers.

'Ah, 'tis passing strange,' I heard the captain say, and he glanced at me curiously, and then the soldier's closed around us and we were marched back to the prison room, and I wished that it had been the Spaniard's head I had cracked on the road to Plymouth.

'Well,' said Sir Jaspar, as the door closed upon us, 'things have come to a pretty pass.'

'Thanks be to you, sir,' I answered coldly.

'What mean you?' he asked quickly.

'You forget that I know somewhat of Spanish, and hence could see the folly of the stories you told the dons.'

'Master Clephane, you are right,' he said humbly, 'and I crave your pardon, but I had perforce to make some answer to show these villains we did not fear them; but, believe me as you will, no story I could have told would save us now.'

'What!' we cried.

'It is but too true, for I heard some of them talking apart, and knowing perchance a little more of Spanish than our worthy friend who has just rebuked me, I found we one and all are doomed to die, but in some curious fashion—which from what was said, I could not understand; still, it is a comfort we shall not be hanged. Verily, I have made a couplet without meaning it; my muse is in excellent trim, 'tis a pity she is so near her end.'

He rambled on, blowing his nose and laughing softly to himself, while the rest of us sat in horror, saying nothing, but I trust trying to find some way of escape—at least, so it was with me, for I had not liked the look of the captain of the *San Fernando*, and still less that of the priest.

'God save us all,' said Master Trelawney, at length.

'I fear me much He alone can,' said Sir Jaspar, 'and as for your last word, Trelawney, it is hardly needed, for I opine that we shall all escape, or all go heavenward, as these devils of Spaniards have no half-measures.'

‘Master Rogers, sir,’ asked one of the men, ‘can’t tell me how we are to be killed, if killed we are to be?’

‘I know not, lad, I know not; but I fear the priest has a hand in this.’

‘May God have mercy on us then,’ said the mariner, ‘for I had a brother who died at their hands in Spain, and one who was with him in prison escaped, and—poor Jim! poor Jim!’

He broke off suddenly with a sob, but we could guess the rest, for in those days the name of the Inquisition was a name by which to terrify a crying child, and had sent a shiver down the back of many a strong man.

For a long time we sat in silence, each wrapt in his own thoughts, and then Sir Jaspar, who could never keep his tongue still, gave a kind of hoarse laugh.

‘This is but a sorry gathering, gentlemen,’ he said; ‘by my faith, we are not dead yet, and, thank God, have voices, so what hinders us striking up a merry stave and showing these Spaniards we are men, and Englishmen. I crave your pardon, Master Clephane,’ he added, bowing low to me, as I could see by the feeble light of an oil lamp which hung swinging from the roof; then in a very tuneful way he sang aloud:—

“What is an Englishman’s trust, my lads,
Say what is an Englishman’s trust?
’Tis the land that he loves, and the Queen whom he serves,
And die for them both he must, my lads,
And die for them both he must.”

With a roar, which made the timbers ring, we joined in the chorus—

“And die for them both he must, my lads,
And die for them both he must.”

Again Sir Jaspar sang,—

“Who must the Englishman fight, my lads,
Say who must the Englishman fight?
The Scotsman, the Turk, the Frenchman, the Don,
And all who would do his land wrong, my lads,
And all who would do his land wrong.”

‘We crave your pardon for this verse, Master Clephane.’
‘By no means,’ said I; ‘’tis easy here to change England

to Scotland, and a Scotsman to an Englishman, though mayhap a trifle difficult on Tweedside.'

'By my faith, a good answer,' laughed Sir Jaspar; 'but the chorus, lads, methinks it sounds well, and will stir up his lean reverence; excellently sung, and now:—

'What does the Englishman trust, my lads,
Say what does the Englishman trust?
He trusts in his sword, his courage, his God,
Till he rests under sea-wave or sod, my lads,
Till he rests under sea-wave or sod.

'Then let us be faithful and true, my lads,
Then let us be faithful and brave,
And guard well the land which our forefathers loved,
Till like them we are laid in the grave, my lads,
Till like them we are laid in the grave."

'With a will, gentlemen! with a will,' shouted Sir Jaspar, and with another roar, tuneless no doubt, but as hearty as strong lungs and throats could make it, the chorus rang out—

"Till like them we are laid in the grave, my lads,
Till like them we are laid in the grave."

Ere we had ceased, the door was thrown open, and on the threshold stood the Spanish captain and the gentleman in black.

'This is a pretty noise, sir,' said the former, in an angry tone, to Sir Jaspar.

'By my faith that is also my opinion,' answered the little knight.

'Let me tell you, señor, you had better be at your prayers.'

'Most fitting, most fitting Señor Capitan, prayers and praise, or, an you will, praise and prayer.'

'Dog of an Englishman,' began the captain, but he was cut short by the tall man beside him.

'These are brave men,' said he. 'Would to the Virgin I had a thousand such to follow me to Guiana, and look you, Captain Gamboa, I protest against this plan of yours and Father Miguel's, I tell you it is infamous.'

'Then you had best protest to the holy father, and hear what he has to say, Don Gomez,' answered the captain roughly, with an ugly smile upon his face. 'Perchance you would have me do it for you?'

'Nay, nay,' said the other, hastily, his face paling a little, and I could see at a glance that he was in mortal dread of the

long, thin figure in the black robe, with the skull-like face and the piercing eyes.

'Look you,' said Captain Gamboa, 'if there is any more of this howling I will have water run on you from above and drown the singing birds.'

'And this vile smell as well, I trust,' Sir Jaspar called after him as the door closed.

'Poor man,' he continued in English, 'he has no heart for melody. Well, of a truth it would not suit his face, and a saw at work is music to his voice, but a good tale is as good as a merry stave, so let us tell one in turns.'

It was a cheerful device this of Sir Jaspar's, and kept us from brooding over our troubles and the fate which we knew awaited us, for we could find no way of escape; and so we kept up our spirits for two long days in that evil stinking hole, and held bone and flesh together with the scanty fare which our jailor set before us twice in the day.

We could catch the sound of hammering and much noise and rattle on the deck each time the door was opened, but when we asked the fellow the meaning of it, he leered at us in horrid fashion, and bade us have patience and we should soon know all. It was on the morning of the third day from the sinking of the *Water Sprite*, that after our wretched breakfast we heard the sound of many footsteps outside, and then the door was thrown open and we were ordered forth one by one, and our bonds tightened as we stepped out. A body of pikemen were in waiting, and they straightway led us on deck, but I noticed that their faces had a grave and silent look as of men uneasy in their minds, and I wondered in what fashion we were to die.

We reached the poop at last, and the pikemen, setting us before them, formed guard in a semicircle behind us, and within the circle stood only Captain Gamboa, the popish priest, and the man with the strawberry mark upon his face.

I had no eyes for them, however, but stared before me in a dull surprise, marvelling at what I saw.

A portion of the high bulwarks had been cut away, and at a level with the deck a platform of planks had been built out over the water, and on these planks was the figure of a woman—a woman without arms and without legs, a woman of iron!

Her face was moulded most beautifully, so that she seemed to smile upon us, but methought it was such a smile as I had seen on the face of the priest when he had listened to Sir Jaspar's lies, and a shiver once more passed down my back. A halo carved of wood and painted a pale blue colour was set about the head of this strange image, and a double ruff of polished steel adorned its neck, while in front of it, upon the planks, was a ring of metal in a half-circle, with but space enough between it and the figure for a man to stand. A great beam, forked at the end, stretched out from the bulwarks, held aloft by a tackle, passing, as far I could see, to the mainyard, and I marvelled still more what all this might mean. I looked around me. There was the little group of Englishmen huddled together like sheep in the shambles, bound and helpless, while close by stood Captain Gamboa and the priest. Beside the image upon the platform was the Spaniard who had lain in wait for Sir Francis, and he smiled as his eyes met mine.

Behind and around me was the single line of pikemen, all clad alike in steel caps and leathern jerkins, while over their heads I could see the tapering masts and network of rigging of the great galleon, and on the yards and spars were crowded her crew and many of the Spanish soldiers ; but I looked in vain for Don Gomez and some others I had seen before.

'Surely,' thought I, 'mortal man never saw so strange a sight as this ;' but something told me that stranger sights would be seen ere that day ended.

As I turned to look at the image again, I saw away beyond it, on the horizon, what I took for a ship's sail, but a second look told me it was but a seabird's plumage glancing white in the morning sunlight, and I felt that, be it bird or ship, it would avail us little now, and fell to watching Sir Jaspar, who was gazing at the image in a quizzical fashion, and poking Master Trelawney in the ribs. I could scarce refrain from smiling, till I chanced to look at the latter's face, and then I was far from smiling, for I called to mind he had been talking, ere we left the room, with the brother of the man who had fallen a victim to the devilry of the secret Inquisition. I looked at the latter and saw that his face was even worse than Master Trelawney's, and then, at a sign from the priest, the villain upon the platform began to speak.

‘Listen, you dogs of Englishmen,’ he shouted. ‘Here we have the iron Virgin, or, if you will, our Lady of the Papacy, and a strange lady she is, for her food is the heretic, and naught but the heretic, and yet she is ever ready for a meal, and look you, she is ready even now.’ With that he touched some secret spring in the figure, and as I looked I saw the front part of it resolve itself into two doors which swung slowly outwards towards us, and then the fiendish design of the image was clear to me, for on the inner aspect of these doors were set row on row of knives, long and sharp-pointed.

‘She is ready for the meal, you mad Englishmen who think to mock the holy truth and trade in lands which are not yours; she is ready, and mark you, her teeth, are they not sharp? are they not keen? She is hungry, I tell you, and the meal is a good one.’

The villain had worked himself into a fury by this time, and the strawberry mark upon his face had turned a dusky purple, while his cruel visage had turned yet more cruel.

‘She thought, poor Virgin,’ he continued, ‘that she would have naught to fill her but poor devils of Indians, and here, by the mercy of God and his Holiness the Pope, she has fallen foul of a band of beef-fed, ale-loving Englishmen, and she is hungry, I tell you, she is hungry!’

‘Now,’ he shouted, ‘look how our Lady eats,’ and touching another spring, the doors closed, and at a signal the great beam descended and pressed them home.

‘Simply done, is it not?’ he asked with a sneer; ‘and mark you, the platform slides, and the food, well chewed, my heretics, well chewed, is cast out and falls downwards where there are other images, figures with sharp teeth also, though not so pretty as our Lady, and if she should fail to eat well, which I have never known her do, then the work will be finished speedily and quickly in the waters below the platform. Our Lady is after the pattern in the vaults of Nuremburg,’ said he, ‘and it may please *you*,’ he added, pointing at me, ‘to know that this is my design, my plan, and I will be revenged upon you, for the Virgin shall embrace you last of all.’

He paused, and then shouted aloud in Spanish,—

‘Now, God save His Majesty the King of Spain, and all

men good and true, but may every heretic he accursed and burn in the fire for ever and for ever.'

'Amen,' said the priest, in a solemn voice, and I heard the pikemen behind me draw deep breaths of mingled horror and relief. We captives stared dully at each other, hardly realising what was about to happen, and then the villain spoke again.

'Listen,' he cried, 'whoever will not bow before the Virgin dies within her, while he who does bow to the authority of Holy Church and to our Lady is saved;' and then he raised his hand and from away forward came the heavy clang of the ship's bell, a single, sullen stroke which chilled me to the heart, and gave signal to begin.

Four pikemen stepped forwards, and separating Sir Jaspar from the others, set him in front of us, and then brought their weapons to the charge to thrust him over the fatal circle within the grasp of the image, which again stood open waiting for its prey. The little knight, however, was not minded to die without a last speech. He bowed most courteously to Captain Gamboa and the priest, and after threatening them with the vengeance of Queen Bess, began a long rigmarole in Spanish, complimenting them upon the good looks of our Lady, and, as I live, passing many a jest upon her and her character, though all the time he had a cunning look in his eyes which made me guess he had some plan running in his head. Finally, he thanked them in a most gracious fashion for refraining from hanging him, which he said was the only form of death he feared, and then, keeping silence for a moment, with bowed head, he looked up and nodded cheerily to us.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'if any of you should manage to escape from these rogues. I pray you carry my most humble respects to her good Majesty, who, I doubt not, will be pleased to hear from me, for, as she has often said— But that is neither here nor there. Also, I beg you to remember me to the Lady Camberden and her set, as also to Susan Wrotterly, whom you will find at the sign of the Boar's Head, half-way between London town and Temple Bar. I have a few small debts which matter little, and as for—'

How long he would have continued talking in this fashion I know not, but at an order from Captain Gamboa he was

set on one side and curtly told that instead of dying in the Virgin he would be hanged when an end had been made of the rest of us, and at this he feigned to look downcast and much perturbed; but I marvelled at his wit, for he had told me before that hanging was a painless death, as he had learned from several boon companions who had become cut-purses and had *half* suffered the penalty which is the proper ending to the life of a road robber.

Master Rogers was the next seized upon as the great bell gave out its dread summons, and being set before the pikemen, just where deck and platform met, he was bidden bow before the image. He paid no heed, but straightened his broad back and called out to us, 'Gentlemen and comrades, farewell. Lads, follow your captain, but an any of you break free, I charge you to seek out a certain maid called Rose Tregarthen, a Cornish lass in the harbour street of Plymouth, and tell her how I died and what I thought of in the end.' But here a sob choked his utterance and again came the heavy clang of the great bell amidships. The pikemen closed in upon him, and though I could not see him, yet I knew he had been pushed beyond the fatal circle, and that the doors had opened and closed upon him, for there was a spring placed within the ring of metal, which acted as the spring in the figure had done.

There was no cry, and no sound, but as I looked upwards I saw the heavy beam fall, and heard it thud as it struck upon the image, and after a moment's pause there came a splash, and the villain on the platform gazed down upon the water, and then said aloud in English,—

'By Saint Anthony, there are three of them here already, and a fourth is on his way.'

Then I closed my eyes and shuddered, for I called to mind the bathers from the *Water Sprite*, and the sharp fin I had seen as we sailed by the shores of Dominica.

CHAPTER XXI

OF THE BURSTING OF THE BONDS, THE UPTURNED BOAT,
AND THE COMING OF THE 'GOLDEN DRAGON'

A GAIN the deep-toned bell sounded, and as the pikemen stepped aside, I saw that the image was open again, but every knife bore upon it a crimson stain, while here and there a little stream of blood trickled downwards on the white planking. It was a gruesome sight, but the fear had left me now, and in its place I was filled with a fierce rage and anger. And yet, when I looked at the priest, I could have sworn he liked the sight no more than I did, and, as I live, I think he was but a fanatic who thought he did his duty in thus murdering innocent men ; but as for Captain Gamboa and the villain on the platform, they gloried in it, if one could judge from their faces, and I longed to have them both by the throat, if only for a moment.

Master Trelawney was the next seized on, and right bravely did the poor lad meet his fate.

'I have no one who cares for me save an old mother at Jaspar's Dene, by St Ive's town,' he said, 'and break it to her gently, I pray, that is, if anyone escapes, and now I commend myself to God, farewell !' and with that I heard the beam thud again, but saw it not, for I could not bear to see him die, having taken a great liking for him and knowing him to have been full of hopes and plans for making a name for himself as a gentleman of fortune. I have no heart to write of this fearful butchery, for even the Spanish seamen and soldiers sickened at it ere it was done ; but I call to mind with pleasure how the man who had been badly wounded at San Domingo made a desperate fight for

it, and kicked the legs from under two of the pikemen, bruising them very sorely, ere he was pushed within the fatal circle.

Nor can I forget how, when it came to the carpenter's turn, he called out to Sir Jaspar, in a steady voice,—

'Tell these devils I am a Catholic, born and bred, but I am still more an Englishman, and rather than bow to this accursed figure I will die as my comrades have done.'

'Bravo,' shouted Sir Jaspar, 'God bless you for a gallant fellow!' and was about to give the message, when at a sign from the man with the strawberry mark, Captain Gamboa clapped his hand across the little knight's mouth, and at the same moment the brave carpenter was driven into the Virgin, and the beam fell. I think the priest would have saved this man, but the lust of blood was come upon the other two, and they were angered at the way each of their victims scorned them and met their fate.

At last none were left save the little cabin boy and myself, but by this time the platform was dyed red around the base of the image, and from the water came the sound of splashing and whip-like cracks as the monsters of the deep fought for their prey. The little fellow had fallen to the deck in a faint, and I thought that surely these inhuman workers of iniquity would have pity upon him as, even if he would, he could not have bowed to the Virgin. In the best Spanish I could muster I begged for his life, but I was struck upon the mouth with the butt end of a pike, and as the bell clanged, his body was lifted, and without ceremony thrown overboard before my eyes. I thanked God he was without sense and feeling, and then braced myself for the end. Like a flash, the thought of De Cusac, of Maid Marjorie, of the brown box and the slaying of De Papillon, passed through my mind. I saw once more the pirate galley, and Phil Bartelow drumming with his heels upon the deck. I felt the rope tighten as it had tightened in the market square of Portsmouth, and called to mind the fierce fight upon the road to Plymouth. I thought of my good friend Simon Grisel, and felt glad he was not here to die; and then the great bell sounded again and I knew the moment had come. I looked up and almost started as I saw that what I had seen upon the horizon was, after all, a ship, and that she had

drawn nearer, and at the sight hope dawned within me, for I knew that the strands which bound me were not over-strong, and rage had given me the power of a madman.

'Farewell, Master Clephane,' said Sir Jaspar, sadly, as the bell tolled again and the doors opened.

'By no means,' said I, in a firm voice, and then the pikemen closed around me. The priest stepped forward beside me and bade me bow.

'That will I,' I answered in Spanish, and bent my head while I could hear a murmur from behind me, and a curse come from Sir Jaspar. But as I bowed I got the rope across my haunches, and with a prayer for help I put out all my strength. The blood surged to my head, my sinews strained as though they would tear asunder, and the rope bit deep into my wrists, and then there came a rending, a sudden crack, and I was free. With a roar of triumph I turned and leaped at one of the pikemen with clenched fist and swinging arm. His face crashed inwards as a hazel nut crashes beneath the boot heel, and in a moment he was lying a corpse, and I had wrenched the pike from him. I bounded at the outer line of soldiers, but they fled before me like frightened sheep. For the mere joy of the thing, I struck one of them down, and then rushed along the poop and leaped into the waist. Two men strove to stop me, but one I felled, and the other I seized and hurled against the mast with such fearful force that I heard his skull crack, and he dropped, a huddled heap, upon the deck.

None dare touch me now, for they deemed me mad, nor were they far wrong, and I reached the foredeck unharmed and sprang upon the bulwarks. Even as I had rushed along the deck, however, I had heard from behind me a wild shriek of pain and horror, and now, as I gazed towards the stern, I saw a form drop from the platform, a form clad in a long, dark robe which was cut to pieces, and through the gaps the red flesh showed as it flashed downwards to the water which was churned into froth and foam by the ravenous sharks. It was Father Miguel, the priest who in my place had by mischance been thrust into the figure, and had met the doom which had awaited me; for, as I learned thereafter, he had started back across the fatal ring and the doors had closed upon him, while the men who worked the beam had been

so startled at my escape that they had let it fall, and so he perished.

At the sight I threw up my arms and shouted aloud, but a musket cracked, and I felt a sharp sting in my left shoulder, as though a red-hot iron had seared it; then with a spring I leaped overboard and sank into the depths. I was not fool enough to rise at once, but swam under water for as long as I could hold my breath, and then rose to the surface. As my head came above the water, there was a rattle of musketry and the balls sputtered and splashed about me, but none reached me, and I dived again, and so continued till out of range. Although at last there was no danger from the bullets, I felt far from happy, and wished the priest had been a bigger man with more flesh upon his bones to keep the sharks in play, for the thought of them gave me a horrid feeling of creepiness in the toes, and every moment I feared would be my last as I swam silently onwards. My shoulder pained me a little, but the sea was calm, and I threw myself upon my back to rest awhile, and saw them busy with a boat upon the galleon. They seemed to be in a confusion as they tried to lower her, for she swung this way and that, and stuck fast ere they got her into the water, and then four men leaped into her, and they began to pull towards me while sail was hoisted on the galleon. I raised myself from the water as best I could, and caught a glimpse of the strange ship's sails, and I could see that she was seen from the *San Fernando* now, and trusted that, were she an English ship, her company would have some desire to know what all this firing meant. Then I lay flat on my back again and husbanded my strength anent the coming of the boat. I soon saw with joy that the fools in their hurry had brought no muskets with them. Two were at the oars, while a black-bearded man with a pike stood in the bow, and I heard him shouting to the rowers.

The fourth sat in the stern and leant over the side to keep an eye on me. I felt that I had but a sorry chance between these villains and the sharks, but it was no worse than it had been, and I thanked God I had learned to swim as few men can swim, therefore I bided my time and thought how I might best cheat both monster fish and Spaniards. I lay quiet and still till they were close upon me, and then I turned on my face and swam slowly, as though hurt. A

moment more and they were up with me, but as the man in the bow leaned over to seize me by the collar of my doublet, I let myself sink slowly out of his reach. With a shout he craned over the side, and though I could not see them, yet I knew the others did the same, and at once I kicked my legs apart and rose a little, reaching upwards with my arms as I did so. My hands grasped the gunwale, I jerked at it with a mighty tug, and slowly the boat heeled over. The Spaniards, terrified for themselves, had not the sense to strike at me, but rose to rush to the other side, and what with the movement, and my weight upon her gunwale, the boat gave a sudden dip, and then over she came crack upon the water, the dons leaping out of her while I dived and swam beneath her to the other side.

So quickly had it all happened, that the boat floated bottom uppermost, having taken in little water when turning over, and I saw my chance of safety. Swimming to her stern, I climbed up upon her with great ease, though my shoulder now pained me cruelly, and within two minutes of her capsizing, was seated astride her keel.

I looked around for the discomfited dons, and saw but three of them, for one had sunk. Nearest the boat was the black-bearded pikeman, and he had the pike below his arms, and was swimming to the boat. One was swimming towards the bow, and I could have shouted for joy when I saw that not only was he the man who had been seated in the stern, but he was the wretch who had planned the torture, the villain who had gibed at us from the platform, the man with the strawberry mark upon his face.

Furthest out of all was one of the oarsmen, but still further away I saw with a shudder, and yet with a feeling of relief, the sharp back fin of a shark, and I marked that it was drawing nearer. The man with the pike reached the side of the boat, but being without brains, poked the spear at me, and with but little trouble I wrenched it from him, and turning it in my hand, prepared to strike him. With a curse he pushed himself off, and then a wild look of horror came upon his face as a fearful scream burst from the lips of the man furthest from the boat. I saw him rear himself out of the water and throw up his arms, while there was a turmoil around him, and then his cry was choked and he was gone.

At this the bearded man yelled with terror, and his face grew livid. He swam to the stern and strove to climb up on the keel, but though I sat facing the bow, I half turned and struck at him furiously, pushing his hand away, so that each time he fell back into the sea. He cursed and raved at first, and then strove silently, save for his splashing, by which he hoped to drive away the sharks. For a moment I thought he would yet escape, as there was no shark to be seen, and the villain at the bow had got astride the keel, and with a knife in his hand was creeping, or rather shuffling, towards me, but it was not to be.

Suddenly I caught sight of two of the dreaded fins moving hither and thither, and then, as though the monsters on whose backs they were had scented prey, they darted towards the boat. The wretched pikeman, who had been glaring over his shoulder, saw them also and redoubled his splashings, while I even had it in my heart to pity him, so ghastly was his face; but I could do nothing for him as I had to reckon also with the villain upon the keel, the man with the strawberry mark upon his face!

It was a strange game to witness. Whenever the miserable man at the stern relaxed his efforts, the sharks drew closer, going and coming like sentinels upon the beat, till at last I could see their great bodies showing dark and shadowy through the blue water, and all the time the man upon the keel was drawing closer to me, and I knew it was a game in which time was everything, and I prayed the sharks would hasten to their work. Moreover, there was a new danger, for with the weight at the stern increasing as my enemy shuffled towards me, I noted that whenever the man in the water laid hold of the boat she tilted upwards at the bow a little, and I feared that in consequence she would sink; therefore the hair bristled upon my head, and I struck and better struck with the pike till the man's hands were covered with blood and bruises. At last he wearied and I saw a look of wild despair come upon his face as his leg moved more and still more feebly, and then there came a sudden rush and swirl, a cry choked ere it was half uttered, a gleam of white bellies, a splashing and a fearful struggle, and as the waters took a ruddy hue and the bubbles were crimson tinted, I was alone with the man upon the keel.

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Setting my teeth, and firmly grasping the pike, I moved slowly to meet him, for I deemed it better to finish the matter quickly and as near the centre of the boat as might be ; but ere I did so, I glanced around and saw the galleon drawing near, and a great three-masted ship clearly in sight, and coming briskly onwards, with a breeze behind her, and judged that the *San Fernando* did not fire at me because of the man who was with me on the boat's bottom, and a plan came into my head whereby I might keep her from firing yet awhile.

As soon as the villain saw me facing him with the pike, he turned pale under his yellow skin, and strove to edge away from me, but I could move faster forwards than he could backwards, and soon I had him within reach of the weapon.

'Dog!' I roared, 'accursed dog! I have you at last and you shall die at my hands.'

I would have taunted him further, being mad with rage at the thought of my poor comrades, but I saw that in his eyes which told me to finish the matter quickly else he would drag me with him to destruction; therefore I steadied myself, and after a rapid feint I lunged fiercely at him, and ran him through the middle, and then clung to the pike with both my hands. He groaned and writhed a little, and then his eyes glazed and his head fell forward, but still I sat and held him there, though the strain was terrible, for my plan was to keep him on the keel as though he yet lived, and so to cheat the crew of the *San Fernando*.

Now, whether they would have fired when they had come closer and seen the truth of the matter I cannot tell, but as the strange ship came sweeping on I saw there was much to-do upon the galleon, and men running hither and thither, while the image was dragged aboard, and I heard the sound of hammering upon the platform. Moreover, sail after sail was hoisted, and as the first of the fresh breeze came down upon her, rippling the water into what mariners call the cat's paws, she was put about and began to draw away from the boat ; and from all these signs I judged that Captain Gamboa liked not the look of the strange ship to windward, and was striving to escape.

As for me, I jammed the pike butt beneath my thigh to ease the strain, and sat with the dead man facing me, and

I watched the colour fade from the mark upon his face, and the blood begin to trickle down the spear shaft, for I dare not let him go, lest the boat should turn over again, and I knew the sharks were not far off.

There I sat therefore and watched the chase, and I soon saw that the new-comer had the heels of the Spaniard, though, as I have before said, the latter was no laggard. The stranger was soon abreast of me, and passed by within a half mile of the boat, but before this she had hoisted English colours, and as I looked at her I became certain I had seen her before, and as she swept past with the breeze astern, her whole fabric now dipping a little, now plunging upwards with a tremulous heaving motion as if she were a living thing, by the great gilded head and neck beneath her heavy bowsprit, as well as by her hull, spars, and the number of her ports, I knew her to be the *Golden Dragon*.

‘Good luck,’ thought I, as I stared at her, and saw the rows of black heads on board her watching me. ‘I will wager my friend the Puppy is there, and if that be so, it may prove a case of from frying-pan into fire;’ and I marvelled at the strange freak of fortune which had sent this craft of all others to my rescue; and then, thinking she might prove but a forerunner of the fleet, I swept the horizon with my gaze, but there was nothing save the blue expanse, now covered with little white-topped waves, and these same waves made it very hard for me to keep the Spaniard as I would have him sit, albeit at the same time I was thankful for the breeze, which lessened somewhat the fearful heat of the sun that beat down upon my uncovered head, and was like to turn me sick and giddy.

The English ship paid no heed to me further than that a man leapt into the shrouds and waved his hand, but I dared not wave back to him, and though I sent him a hail, yet I doubt if it reached him, for my voice was strangely weak, and my throat as dry as any wine-bibber’s.

With straining eyes I watched her come and go, and a great fear arose within me lest the chase should pass out of view, and lest I might be left to sit upon the boat’s keel, till, from sheer lack of strength, I would fall off, or till, instead of one corpse upon it, there would be two.

I might have kept my mind easy, howbeit, for the galleon

had been too late of getting the breeze, and now, despite her best efforts, had no chance with her pursuer, and soon I saw the latter yaw a little, a white puff of smoke curled from her bows, and there came the sound of a gun across the waters.

They were too far off for me to note if the Spaniard had come by any damage, as her masts still kept standing and all her sails remained set, but I prayed that she might not escape, and at last, to my joy, I saw her shorten sail and await the coming of the *Golden Dragon*. They were full two miles away from me, yet I could see, as was ever the case with Spaniards, that the English ship had got the weather gauge of the galleon, and then there came the roar of cannon, and the white smoke rose about the two great vessels and drifted away to leeward in heavy masses as the breeze caught it.

It seemed strange to me to sit and watch a fight in this fashion; nor was it what I would have chosen, for to see it I had to screw my head round till I took a crick in my neck, and what with this, the motion of the boat, the weight of the dead man and the fear of sharks, I felt that I had rather run the risks of a dozen fierce battles than sit another hour astride the boat. My tiny craft, however, was drifting towards the scene of battle, and though the warships may have drifted too, yet I thought I was drawing a trifle nearer them, though by this time I was past much thinking, and there was a clanging in my head like the sound of the great bell of the *San Fernando*, and strange fancies took me and I saw dead faces in the water—the faces of Jack Rogers, of Trelawney, and the carpenter, and the ghastly, skull-like face of the priest.

Fearing lest my brain should turn with the horror of the thing, I shook myself and tried to pipe Sir Jaspar's song; but though the air of it ran in my head, yet my parched lips and dry tongue made but sorry work, and after a time I ceased, and, steadying the dead man—for he was swaying overmuch—I fell to twisting my neck and watching the fight once more. I could see that the galleon was getting the worst of it, as though for the most part the English ship hid her from me, yet now and again I got a glimpse of her. One of her masts had been shot away, and even at the distance from which I watched her she looked more like a wreck than a warship of Spain, while the *Golden Dragon*

seemed to have suffered but little. How long the battle raged I know not, but the dead Spaniard and I seemed to sit for hours ere the roar of the cannon ceased, and the red flash and smoke from the guns were things of the past ; but at last I saw that the galleon had been taken, and remember trying to cheer as I thought I should see the hanging of Captain Gamboa, and I prayed he was unharmed, and then in a hazy way I can remember that I spoke to the dead man, and taunted him, and strove to tickle him with the pike, and then I can recall nothing of what followed till the sound of voices was in my ears, and I opened my eyes and stared dully around me.

The *Golden Dragon* and the galleon—now a most pitiful sight, for her other mast had gone—lay some half mile away, and close to me was a boat filled with men, and it was their voices I had heard, and again a man in her bows hailed me. I could not answer, but sat and looked at her, and wondered if the dead man saw her. She ran alongside the upturned boat, and I heard a murmur of many voices, and, as I live, I saw Sir Jaspar's little face, and then I felt a kind of fear and strove to rouse myself lest ill should befall me, for in the stern sheets, beside Sir Jaspar, sat a man I knew—a young man with a handsome, sneering face, the man whose throat I had gripped in the prison at Portsmouth.

I can call to mind other faces full of pity, and being seized by strong arms, and I remember hearing a splash and a roar of laughter as Sir Jaspar said something in his piping voice ; and then I felt sleepy, and the clanging bell-sound came into my head again, only slower now, as it had clanged when the image did its fearful work, and then it too passed away, and what next came to pass, and what happened after the galleon was taken, I must tell as Sir Jaspar told it me when we lay bound on board the *Golden Dragon* off the Island of Trinidad, half-stified by the heat, and the food of insects innumerable.

CHAPTER XXII

OF THE TALE AS TOLD ME BY SIR JASPAR, AND MY
SWIM IN THE NIGHT

‘WELL, old Broad-back, dost feel better? You have lost nigh four good days of life, and in these times, four days are four days, I warrant; and to say truth, Master Clephane, ’tis time your senses came back, for things have come to a pretty pass once more.’

It was Sir Jaspar’s voice I heard as I rolled over on my side, and found myself lying in a dark and dismal timber-walled space, which somehow seemed strangely familiar to me. My head was clear, my shoulder did not pain me, the flesh wound having healed, and save for a great emptiness of stomach and a craving for food, I felt myself again, and as I remembered all that had gone before, I found the horror of it had passed away, and thanked God my reason was still with me. Still I wondered why I should be lying in this place with the little knight, and still more why my arms should be fastened to my sides, and therefore being anxious to know what had befallen me, I turned, and, despite the gloom of the place, made out Sir Jaspar, who seemed to be in a similar plight.

‘I am myself again,’ I answered, ‘but how comes it we are bound?’

‘Tis a long tale, Jeremy, a long tale, but having naught better to do, I may as well tell you what has come to pass while you have been lying as senseless as a log, and, to say truth, I fear we are in as bad a plight as when with the brave fellows of the *Water Sprite* we lay bound aboard the galleon.’

‘But,’ said I, ‘this is a ship of England,’ for I had recognised that this dirty hole was the same I had been thrust into when I had been picked up by the *Golden Dragon* in the North Sea.

'No doubt,' he answered, 'no doubt, but a sorry Englishman commands her.'

'Why, Captain Ambrose, though a trifle strict, seemed to me a most worthy gentleman.'

'Far be it from me to say aught against his grey head, but you see, Jeremy, my boy, Captain Ambrose happens to sleep in some few fathoms of sea water, and, as the Scripture hath it, his worthy nephew reigns in his stead.'

'Not Ned Saltcombe?'

'Even so, as villainous a scapegrace as ever missed the gallows. Pray God he swings some day, for he has done a foul deed and is like to do more.'

'Amen to that,' said I; 'but what has happened?'

'Listen, then, Jeremy, and you shall hear all, and then we must form some plan of escape as we value our necks. After you had tricked the Spaniards and gone overboard, that lean old rascal, Father Miguel, stepped back a trifle far as the pikemen rushed forward to stop you, and getting within the spring, was straightway resolved into minced meat, or rather into minced bones and skin, to my great joy and the horror of the dons. For a moment I wondered why you had taken the trouble to escape, though I would not have missed the sight for a pension, as the death, if painful, was a quick one, till I saw the *Dragon* away to windward, and then, deeming it prudent to delay my hanging if I could, I slipped below. In the confusion I was unnoticed, and hid myself in the room we had so lately left, and, Jeremy, it was a bitter hour I spent there, thinking of the murderous work on deck, and the last looks of my brave comrades, though, to say truth, I took some comfort at the thought of Father Miguel and the pikeman you had struck down, for you had well-nigh driven your fist clean through his skull.

'I feared you must have fallen a victim to sharks or bullets, for I did not know they had lowered the boat, though I heard the musket shots, and believe me, Jeremy, I grieved for you likewise as I have ever loved a man who could strike a shrewd blow, be he what he might.'

To this doubtful flattery I made no answer, and Sir Jaspar, being now in his element, continued his tale.

'However, after a time, I heard the sound of a gun, and then felt that the galleon had been hove to, and soon I

knew we were being pounded by the stranger ship, and gave thanks accordingly, but deemed it wise to sit and wait, either till we began to sink or were taken. Nevertheless, when a ball came plunging in beside me, I thought I might as well see how matters went, and very cautiously crept up to the hatchway, and saw with much delight some dozen of the galleon's crew squirming under the mainmast, which had fallen on them as they worked the guns. I also caught sight of Don Gomez and some others, who, I learned afterwards, had stood out against the cruelty of the priest and Captain Gamboa, and had been surprised and shut into the stern cabin while the devilry was going on.

'The decks were littered with spars and tangled rigging, dead and wounded men, and I saw that full half the cannon had been silenced, and that the galleon was doomed. The dons fought well, howbeit, but ere long the *Dragon* ran alongside her, and then I hid myself below again till all was quiet on deck.

'Then, Jeremy, I had a merry time o't, for, coming on deck, I found the Spaniards, who had made away with the platform and the image, were throwing dust in Captain Ambrose's eyes, and had trumped up some tale of mutiny to explain the firing. By my head, they were like to go mad when I appeared from below and stepped upon the poop. I was in no hurry, and, as my fashion is, blew my nose very carefully on three several occasions, after which I made the dons a little speech, which turned them sick with fear, and then I made known the story of their fiendish work.

'By Queen Bess, my boy, Captain Ambrose, as you say, was a worthy gentleman, for in a twinkling he had Captain Gamboa, and half-a-dozen more, with nooses round their necks, and scarce giving them time for an Ave or a Pater Noster, he ran them up to the yard-arm of the *Dragon*, in sight of both crews, and I could have hugged him for it, so fearful was I lest the villains should escape. As I have told you, Jeremy, hanging is an easy death, but that arch fiend, Ned Saltcombe, has a way of making it most mightily prolonged, only, as we are likely to make acquaintance with it ere long, I shall say naught more concerning it, save that I had rather die twice over in the Virgin than dangle as Captain Gamboa dangled. It was only then that I noticed our friend, with

the mark upon his face had not perished with the rest, and I made inquiry for him, with the result that the upturned boat was remembered, for, on my honour as a knight, they had all clean forgotten having passed her, and so, to cut a long story short, you were rescued, and, as I live, never have I seen a stranger sight than your squat self and the ugly Spaniard with the pike sticking in him.

‘It was then, Jeremy, that, having heard there were four men in the boat when she left the galleon, I came to look upon you as something out of common, and, by my faith, you are a marvel, for here you lie and naught wrong with you but an unholy greediness after meat.’

I laughed a little at his queer way of putting things, and bade him go on with the tale.

‘Well,’ said he, ‘I soon found that this villain, Saltcombe, had no great liking for you, and I had some inkling of the reason, for poor Jack Rogers told me something of your story.’

‘Howbeit, honest old Captain Ambrose treated us both well, and took good care of you, but he had occasion to flog six of his crew for having got drunk on the wine taken in the *San Fernando*, which, by the way, had been driven out of her course by the same storm of which old Hocus made such a mess. Now methought this was but poor policy in a ship separated from the fleet, for they were surly fellows, and, moreover—curse those flies.’

‘I have done so a score of times without avail,’ said I.

Sir Jaspar groaned. ‘Moreover,’ he went on, ‘I had seen an ugly look come into Saltcombe’s face when the captain had refused to bind you, and seeing all this, and the crew being weakened by reason of those on board the galleon, I deemed it wise to keep my ears and eyes open, and I soon found that a pretty plot was in process of hatching. Only the night before last I found myself close to a band of them talking high treason and forming a plan whereby, on the day following, they might capture the *Dragon*, and what was more, I made out that Saltcombe was at the bottom of this plot, and had so worked upon the crew that some whom I had thought honest fellows had joined the rogues. As you may think, I was not long in warning Captain Ambrose against the villains, but the old pig-head only laughed at me and

hinted that the sights on board the *San Fernando* had turned my head. I reasoned with him, but it availed nothing, and then, being, as you know, a trifle short in the temper, I rated him for his folly, telling him that if he desired his throat cut I would rather keep mine whole, till he clapped me below and locked me up in this very hole, and what was more, one of the rascally mutineers was set over me, so I had no chance of putting the honest men of the crew upon their guard. It was a cunning enough plot and one likely to succeed, as the galleon, with most of the captive dons aboard her, was to lie and refit at an island to the north of Trinidad, and thereafter join us off Port d'Espagne, where we had learned there was chance of booty; also I came to think it was nothing new, as I gathered that having, like the *Water Sprite*, been separated from the fleet, it was chiefly by Saltcombe's trickery that they had decided to sail southwards instead of making for Nombre de Dios. As you may suppose, Jeremy, I lay here and listened like a cat for signs of the carrying out of the plot, and sure enough, on the following day, the sound of pistol shots and a great hubbub on deck reached me, and then the door was thrown open, and without a word you were pitched in beside me. I feared at first you had followed the rest of my comrades, but found you were still merely in the strange stupor from which you have just now wakened.

'Since then I have learned from the new guard, who is not a bad fellow, that old Ambrose has been killed, stabbed in the back by his inhuman nephew, who, as far as I can gather, owed him his rank and position, and who is now in command. The crew, after a wild orgie, have settled down, and the *Dragon* is off Trinidad, lying at anchor in the Gulf of Paria, abreast a town known strangely enough as San Fernando, some thirty miles to the south of Port d'Espagne; and what is more, few, if any, English ships have ever visited these parts. I cannot learn if the galleon is with us, but I deem it unlikely, for the most of her crew were honest fellows, and the man in command of her called Denham is, from what I saw of him, a good man and true, with but little liking for this Saltcombe.'

'I do not wonder at it,' said I, 'for though I have not seen much of him, I have each time hated him the more.'

'And how did you fall in with him at the first?' asked Sir Jaspar.

Thereupon I not only told him of my first adventure with the Puppy, but having his sympathy, and knowing him, despite his little fopperies, to be a trusty comrade, I made known to him all that had befallen me since I met De Cusac, and I could have laughed as I saw the wonderment on his face.

'Heart of grace,' said he, 'of all tales this is the finest, and to think I once looked upon you as one void of experience. We live to learn, Jeremy, we live to learn. I do not wonder Master Saltcombe has little love for you, but concerning this Mistress Marjorie of whom you have said little, can't tell me more about her?'

'I care not to say much, for she was, I fear, but a jade.'

'Nay, nay, Jeremy, you have but little knowledge of women. Had you known them as I do, you would have taken comfort and tried your luck again.'

'But you have seen only fine ladies of the Court.'

'So you say. Well, I will not gainsay it,' he answered, with a sly look on his face, 'but they are all alike, as full of fancies as—'

'Sir Jaspar Loveday,' I interposed.

He laughed, not a whit ill pleased, and after cursing the flies again he lowered his voice.

'We have other things to think of, though,' he said; 'I have had half-a-dozen plans in my head, but none seemed likely to succeed.'

'Failing the galleon,' said I, 'are we likely to find another English ship in these waters?'

'Well, I have heard tell of some curious lake of pitch with a beach of the same strange make, and ships go there to refit and be daubed over, but I fear they are mostly dons.'

'It is a poor chance,' I said, 'but it seems to be our only one, and I had rather be in a strange Spaniard's hands than in Ned Saltcombe's.'

'Hast a plan, Jeremy?'

'Listen, Sir Jaspar. Dost know where this strange lake is?'

'It is somewhere in the south of the island and near the western coast. I think the place bears a French name, but cannot say for certain, though I have seen it marked upon the chart as having good holding ground and being sheltered.'

'Failing the *San Fernando*, we must make for it then.'

'Have with you, Jeremy; but how? that is the question, as they say in the play-house.'

'By swimming ashore, and then on foot. It cannot be far from here, for I also have seen the chart you speak of, and it showed this town off which we are at anchor.'

'But, Jeremy, I can swim no better than a stone.'

I whistled softly and thought awhile.

'Could we not steal one of the ship's boats?'

'It were well-nigh impossible,' said Sir Jaspar. 'There is the guard at the door.'

'He is of little account,' I answered. 'I trow I have a plan for him.'

'Good lack! You are as full of plans as a countryman of fleas, but they keep a strict watch on deck, I know, for, like all rogues, they distrust each other.'

'Then I must bring help to you.'

'But how?'

'As you know now, I can swim a trifle better than a stone. Well, I will set you free, and then you can do the same for me. I will manage the fellow at the door, and slip overboard and so ashore, and then make for this anchorage of which you speak. If there is no help to be had there I must find some other means of getting you out of this; but look you, Saltcombe has no great cause for hating you, as probably he does not know that you warned Captain Ambrose, and so, after I am gone, he may set you free and you may thus find some chance of escaping.'

'By Queen Bess, it is a rash plan, yet I can think of none better, and something must be done and done quickly; but I have heard that these waters, being rendered muddy by some great river, swarm with sharks, and the guard has told me that Saltcombe is friendly with the Spaniards on shore, and thus they are likely to help him against you, and they know the country.'

'Well, well, I must even take my chance, for it is certain if I stay there would be an end of me, and mayhap of you also, while if I escape I may draw Saltcombe after me, and if I get him alone, may God have mercy upon him, for I will have none. What say you, Sir Jaspar. The crew without him would perchance turn honest. As I live, you might even take command.

'Captain Loveday! It sounds well, and were welcome as a change,' said the little knight, and I knew he was longing to pull at his moustachios, which, despite his troubles, he had somehow managed to keep greased and curled. 'You give one hope, Jeremy, and should have been a spy like your long squinting friend on board the *Water Sprite*.'

'Poor Simon!' said I. 'Shall I ever see him again, I wonder?'

'I would call him rather happy Simon, for had he been with us the Virgin would have had him, without doubt, like poor Jack Rogers and the others,' said Sir Jaspar, and was silent for a time.

We thought over the plan till nightfall, and Sir Jaspar could offer no better; and so, before the guard paid his last visit, I had gnawed through the rope which bound the little knight's hands, and he had loosed me, taking care, however, to do no damage to the lashings, for they had to serve to bind him, so that Saltcombe might think he was no party to my escape. Then, as I heard the guard fumbling at the door, I crept behind it and waited for him. He entered, bearing a pitcher and platter, and next moment, ere he could utter a cry or start backwards, I had grasped his neck from behind with both my hands, and pressing inwards with my fingers in a manner Sir Jaspar had shown me, I quickly caused him to lose his senses, and Sir Jaspar seized the pitcher and platter before he let them fall, and closed the door. I laid him gently out at full length and bound his hands with the rope that had fastened Sir Jaspar, while by sprinkling the water on his face we soon brought him back to life, though for a brief space he remained dazed and stupid. Then I spoke to him quietly, and with my fingers gripping his windpipe, I let him know that he should have his life if he did as he was told, but that if he cried out, or made any sound, I would strangle him forthwith. Being no fool, and at heart a worthy enough fellow, he promised to obey, and, moreover, told us that he cared not if we escaped, provided only he should not suffer for it.

Moreover, we found out from him that the galleon had not appeared, after which I made known to him a plan of escape, which, however, was not ours, and then I gagged him lightly, and bound Sir Jaspar, after gripping his hand till the

tears came into his eyes. Then I ate a little, and taking the guard's dagger, for I was without a weapon, I at last bade Sir Jaspar farewell, and fastening my shoes around my neck I crept out and closed and locked the door behind me. It was not long before I reached the fore-hatchway, meeting no one, and hearing nothing but the tread of the watch on the deck above, and very cautiously I raised my head above the combing and looked about me. It was a dark night, and all abaft the foremast was faint and indistinct, but I caught the sound of voices coming from the poop, while the snore of some heavy sleeper sounded strangely loud.

Forward were two men with their backs towards me, leaning over the bulwarks, and, as a second glance showed me, looking away from the shore, which, despite the gloom, I could make out as a dark line, and judged it to be some half-mile away. 'The fates are with you, Jeremy,' said I to myself, and very softly I crawled upwards, and crouching low I ran across the deck under the shadow of the bulwarks. Then I crept forwards yard by yard, stopping when one of the men turned and yawned, and creeping on again when his back was to me, and then I turned cold with fear, for I stumbled against a man lying on the deck. For a moment I stood, irresolute and then, as he did not stir, quietly and swiftly I stooped down, and running my hand up his body I seized his throat. But as I did so I all but cried out in horror, for it was a dead man's throat I clutched, the skin cold and clammy; there was no movement and no sound of breathing. Next moment I had loosed my hold and was creeping onward again, wondering whether the man had been done to death or no, and marvelling at my luck, and so at last I reached the bows, and pausing a moment to take breath, for I felt half-stifled with excitement and the beating in my chest, I searched for the hawse-hole and the anchor rope.

I found both readily enough, and without difficulty glided over the side, and slipped downwards till I grasped the cable with both my hands, and I started as I did so, for the night silence was broken by the clang, clang of the ship's bell sounding the hour, and I called to mind when last I had heard a bell toll loudly. I hung motionless for a second and looking downward saw the dark water stretching out-

wards from the great vessel's side, and thought of the monsters which might be prowling in it, then with a prayer for help, and a curse at my own folly, I slipped gently down the rope and so into the sea. The water was warm and pleasant to be in, and very gently I struck out, swimming on my side, and going slowly for a time till the shape of the *Golden Dragon* began to grow blurred and indistinct, and then quickening my pace I darted through the water as fast as I could ply legs and arms.

Once I stopped as a hail came from the ship, but it was merely the cry of the watch, and I got under way again only to pause once more when there was a loud splash not far away and a blowing sound. Howbeit, nothing came of it, and after a long time I found myself close to the shore, and swimming more quietly again I reached a place where bushes grew close upon the water, and I was much surprised to find their stems rising from out it, and still more so when I felt shell fish of the shape of oysters covering their stems as if they grew upon the bushes. I dragged myself ashore with some difficulty, and taking thought for the morrow, I gathered some of this strange fruit, and then scrambled onwards over the snake-like roots of thick, low-growing bushes under which I could hear the water lap and gurgle, and from a distance came a strange chorus of croakings, now a solitary croak, anon a burst of sound, the noise of the frogs which lived in this dreary swamp and sang praises no doubt as best they could. I was right glad at last to get on firmer ground, and putting on my shoes I stood awhile to rest, being afraid to sit for fear of snakes and venomous insects, as I had heard tell of scorpions and great hairy spiders whose bite is death. I can remember how, as I stood there, a multitude of strange sounds came to my ears, the croak of frogs and the hum and chirrup of insects, the harsh cries of night birds and the soft rustle of the shore breeze amongst the forest trees, while away to my left I could faintly hear the burden of some Spanish song, and creeping in that direction I made out a few distant lights and knew, for I had taken my bearings on board the ship, that I was to the south of the village of San Fernando.

Fearing discovery, I turned and plunged into the woods again, keeping as close as might be to the shore, and hurry-

ing on as best I could, and it was no easy matter, for creepers innumerable covered the ground and formed a coating for the trees which had fallen. More than once I heard what I took to be a snake glide away from me, and I kept the knife ready in my hand, as, for aught I knew, I might fall in with ravenous beasts or man-eating savages. It was hard work forcing a way in the darkness through this tangle of tropical growth, and what with this, and the adventures I had just passed through, I soon felt weak and paused to rest as I came to a part of the beach a trifle more free of vegetation. After wringing out my clothes, I sat down with my back to a queerly-shaped black rock, which stood like a sentinel near the water's edge, and a great drowsiness stole over me which I strove in vain to shake off, for, despite my efforts, I had made but little progress, and feared that I would be taken if I was pursued. I soon, however, found it useless, and feeling a trifle reckless and devil-may-care, I wormed myself into a position where I might lie with comfort, and the air being free of flies and the ground of creeping things, I fell asleep with an easy mind and a resolve to wake ere the break of day.

But it is one thing to make a resolution and another to keep it, and so it came about that the sun had been up and at his work a full three hours before I yawned, and stirred, and wondered where I was and why I felt stiff about the back and knee joints. I soon remembered what had befallen me, and sitting up took stock of my surroundings. The beach was the strangest I had ever seen, being hard and black, with here and there a stretch of silvery sand. The trees and bushes grew close down to the water's edge in parts, and the sea, in times gone by, had worn the rocks into fantastic shapes and hollowed out little caves and crevices into which the muddy waters of the gulf were lapping gently, and out of which they gurgled as if beaten back by an unseen foe. On some of the rocks grew strange plants, prickly, and fleshy leaved, while a few of the larger trees bore brilliant blossoms of red and purple, and others were festooned with flowering creepers.

Away out across the gulf I could see a dark cloud bank on the horizon, and judged it to be the mainland, for on board the *Water Sprite* I had studied the chart to good effect, but I

cared little what it was, for my whole attention was taken up by seeing the *Golden Dragon* lying at anchor and finding that as the crow flies, I was not much more than a mile away from her, for in my scramble through the woods I had followed the curve of the coast line and was now at the end of a little point of land which jutted seawards. However, I reflected that for the nonce I was safe enough, and though I could find no water to drink, I made a breakfast on the oysters which I had plucked overnight, and found them not far short of those I had eaten in the inn at Exeter, though both in size and number they were too short for me. I had scarce finished them, and got cautiously upon my feet, keeping out of sight of the ship, when the boom of a gun came across the waters and I could see a curl of smoke rise from the *Dragon's* bows, and looking more intently could note a bustle on deck, and then a boat was lowered and seven or eight men tumbled into her. I waited only to see where she was going, and finding her pull in the direction of the village I entered the woods again and at my best speed made for the lake of pitch, taking a short cut as I saw the trend of the shore to the southward.

CHAPTER XXIII

OF THE SINKING IN THE LAKE OF PITCH, AND THE MAN WITH THE PIKE

VERY soon, despite the shade of the trees, it grew hot and close, and in places I had to clear a path for myself with the dagger, which luckily was sharp edged, so that by noon I was so worn out that I wished I had kept to the shore, albeit it looked a longer way and lacked shelter. Reaching a place where the trees grew more sparsely, and there was a carpeting of coarse grass, I squatted down after a careful look for snakes, and took in my belt by one hole, lest I should get hungry. All was quiet in the woods now, the silence being death-like, for in these regions, man, beast and insect must hide and rest in the noon-day heat when the sun's fierce rays beat down on sea and forest, plain and hill. An hour passed and it became cooler, so, rising, I once more set out upon my weary search, but as I began to make better headway, the forest being more open, I suddenly stopped and listened intently, and then, with a new fear besetting me, I set off in wild haste, slipping and scrambling, heated and sweating, but thinking nothing of it, for what I had heard away behind me was the deep bay of a hound, and I called to mind Sir Jaspar had told me that Saltcombe was friendly with the Spaniards.

I saw it all now and cursed my long sleep and rest in the glade, for it was clear to me that I was being tracked with bloodhounds, as I had heard the Indians in San Domingo were sometimes tracked, and I felt that Ned Saltcombe must indeed bear me a terrible hatred to chase me after this fashion in such a place. Again the long howl of the dog reached me as far off as before it seemed, and on I rushed, bruised, and with my hands torn, hoping to find some brook

or river where I might throw my pursuers off the scent, and wondering if it was much further to the lake of pitch.

When next the hounds gave tongue I could tell that they were gaining on me, and, do what I could, I had to stop now and then to get my breath back and ease my distress a little. I was in a sorry plight, for even if I reached the anchorage near this lake it was but the merest chance if any ship was there, and if there was, and she should prove to be a Spaniard, I might be in as bad case as before.

As I thought of those things and took a sharp pain in my left side, I felt it would be easier to turn and die fighting, but then came the thought that Sir Jaspar depended on me ; and so, with a prayer for help and a happy ending to this terrible chase, I set my teeth, and with clenched hands and labouring breath ran wildly, crashing into and through bushes, starting little creatures which fled from me in terror, and putting flocks of gay-plumaged, noisy birds to flight. Now and again my foot caught, or I slipped and fell, and I would fain have rested, but ever and anon the deep bay from one of the dogs, for I could tell that there were at least a couple, sent me staggering on in mad haste. At the best, however, my progress was but slow, and despite my good start, I knew full well it was a matter of time only, for one of the dogs was overhauling me rapidly. Very soon I saw it would be wiser to take breath for the struggle which was sure to come, and stepping behind the stem of a great tree, I waited for the foe. There was silence for a space of ten minutes, and then quite close to me the dog gave tongue again, this time in short, sharp yelps ending in a whine, as the clever beast knew he was nearing his prey. At last he came in sight, a huge, unwieldy brute, with a tawny muzzle, and great hanging jaws, on which the foam had gathered in whitish-yellow flecks. He came lumbering on between the trees at a steady trot, throwing his nose up now and then, and leaping over obstacles in a way I envied, and I could see his deep-sunk, blood-shot eyes, and caught a glimpse of his great, yellow tusks. His hide was of a greyish brown, and he looked an old dog and a wary one, but I trusted that he might be a trifle stiff, and would feel the knife between his ribs as soon as he was abreast of me. I scarce dared to breathe as I watched him, and he

seemed to trust solely to his nose, never halting and travelling quickly. I had sought to baffle him in my manner of reaching the tree, for I had swung myself up to a great branch which hung within reach across my path, and had clambered along it to the stem, and now I waited anxiously to see if he would be at fault. On he came, and his breathing sounded deep and heavy, and then as I peered through the creepers which warped round the trunk, I saw him reach the spot. In a moment he threw up his head and gave a long howl of dismay, then, with nose to ground, he began running hither and thither, his tail lashing from side to side, while he growled deeply in his throat. I clutched the dagger firmly and bided my time, then as he came near my hiding-place and turned with his back to me, I darted out upon him. With a single leap I was upon his back, and grasping his rough neck to steady me, I plunged the long blade up to the hilt in his side, once, twice, and yet again. He gave one fearful howl of pain and then sank down, the blood oozing from his mouth, and I knew he would never more track Indian or Scot. Dragging my knife out, I left his carcase as it lay, and took to flight again, for the bay of the other dog reached me, and what was worse, the shouts of someone urging the dog on, and though I felt that I might deal with one or other, both, I feared, would be too many for me.

I ran with more ease now, for my breath came freely and I felt rested ; but though I made good progress, the dog soon began to give the short, eager yelps which told me he was getting close. I was about to halt and turn at bay, when I noticed the wood seemed thin in front of me, and bursting through a thick belt of broad-leaved bushes I came upon that which I at once knew to be the lake of pitch. Imagine a great black expanse, one and a-half miles in length, and perchance two-thirds of a mile across, circled by the green forest, interspersed with water-courses which glittered in the sunlight, and dotted here and there with little islands of trees and shrubs. About my feet the grass was long and coarse, and there were many lily-shaped flowers of a reddish, yellow hue, while on the other side of this strange lake, beautiful palms, with feathery and tufted tops, rose high above the scrub and undergrowth.

I had little time, however, to gaze at this weird scene,

for I could hear the rustle of the dog as he sped after me, and the cracking of dry twigs. My only chance lay in trying to cross the lake, which looked firm and solid, and I trusted the dog would fear to follow me, as a hot, evil-smelling wind blew upon my face—for I knew that at times an animal will prove wiser than a man, and will not venture upon a doubtful place. I dared not try to skirt the margin, and to turn back meant speedy death, and so, with fear at my heart, and the sound of the dog at my heels, I rushed out upon this God-forsaken waste.

I found the pitch a trifle soft, but quite firm under foot, though it felt hot even through the thick shoe-soles, and I ran lightly over it, leaping the water channels, in which I noted tiny fish and beetles, and a thick, yellowish slime in some parts. I sped on past one of the islands, and I can call to mind that I saw a tiny bird of gorgeous plumage flitting like a rainbow chip amongst the greenery, and I even wondered what it did in this loathsome spot, and then I thought of nothing but the patter behind me, and I knew the hound had followed me upon the pitch. Closer and closer I heard him come, and the sound of the man's voice urging him on grew louder; but still I laboured forwards, drawing my breath in heavy gasps like a hunted deer, and feeling my legs heavy as lead, while the sweat ran down my face as if it had been rain. Once I leapt short and landed at the edge of the broad water-course, sending a shower of the dull, brown water over me, and losing time—for I slipped backwards a little. At last I could even hear the brute's hard breathing and a coughing noise in his throat, and then I suddenly found myself running straight for a horrible place—a broad stretch where the pitch was soft, and bubbled and seethed like porridge in a cauldron, while a sickly steam rose from it, and there was a stench of sulphur and of brimstone, as though it were the mouth of hell itself. I had no time to run around this fearful spot, and I doubted much whether I could clear it; but nothing else was left me, and crouching low at its edge I leaped high into the air. But even as I did so, the patter behind me ceased, there was a hoarse growl and the sound of a splutter, and then, while I was in mid-air, my doublet was gripped from behind, and down I went into the oozing, bubbling blackness. It

was not so soft as I had thought it, nor yet so hot, and I might have scrambled out but that the hound—who had fallen with me—still gripped me as in a vice. I strove to wrest myself free from his teeth, and then a fearful struggle began, for as I dragged the cloth from him he made at my throat, his tongue lolling out and his great fangs showing. I had sunk above my knees in the horrid stuff, and had lost my dagger, but still I had fight left in me, and as he spluttered towards me, sinking deeper with every effort, I seized him by the head and tried to thrust him downwards. For a time he withstood the strain, and then, as he felt he was being conquered, he set up a hideous noise, yowling and barking, till with a great effort I smothered his head beneath the filthy pitch and kept him down till the quiverings of his body and the lashings of his tail had ceased, and I knew that, like the other dog, his hunting days were over.

As I relaxed my hold, a curse reached me, and then a low, mocking laugh. I looked up and saw, on the further edge of this hateful slough, the man whose voice I had heard cheering on the hounds, and as I gazed at him my heart sank within me, for he was no other than the villain Saltcombe.

I soon found, however, that it mattered little who he was, for in my fierce conflict with the hound I had sunk up to my hips, and was slowly but surely going down inch by inch into the hot and stinking pitch, for I could not get a grip of the dog's body, at least of that part above the surface.

A groan burst from me, and I struggled fiercely to free myself, but it served no purpose, save to hasten my sinking and give cause for merriment to the sneering wretch who had brought me to this plight.

'So ho! my little friend,' said he, still panting from his run, 'I am in at the death, it seems. I am even glad you have made an end of the Spaniard's dog, for it will be the means of giving you a more pleasant death, and your rate of sinking is, I think, most excellent.'

'You vile murderer,' I answered, 'would to God I might slay the puppy as I have done the dog.'

'I fear you have but little chance, nay, I think I might even say no chance,' he sneered, 'for though I might perhaps help you to get free, I am not minded to do so, Master Pirate.'

'You are a devil,' said I, 'and not a man.'

'Nay, nay,' said he, 'you will soon find who the devil is and know more of him than I do, for, let me tell you, none meddle with Ned Saltcombe and go free, and think you, fool, you left this kerchief behind you and so gave scent for the dogs. As I live, you must have desired to quit this world, and am I not kind to aid you?'

I paid no heed to his ravings, however, for away beyond him from the edge of the forest I saw a man appear, a tall man, who stood still like a statue, leaning upon a pike. Though he was over a hundred yards away, and though I could scarce believe that my eyes did not deceive me, I knew that long, lean figure, and in a moment I set up a wild cry.

'Simon,' I shouted, 'Simon to my help!'

The villain laughed at me and mocked me further.

'So you are a Catholic,' he said. 'I thought you ever called him Peter. Dost know him well? If you think to gain pity from the dons, you may save your breath, for they are slow runners and are far behind, and by the time they are here naught but the head of your ugly carcase will be showing.'

He babbled on, taunting and mocking me, but I never so much as heard what he was saying, for at my shout, I had seen the man start and turn, and then, bringing his pike to the trail, he had begun running towards us. I had sense enough left not to watch him fixedly, lest Saltcombe should wonder at what I was staring, and escape, so I only made sure that I had not been mistaken, and then fixed my eyes on the villain's face, and saying nothing. I sank downwards very gently and very slowly, disturbed only by the steam and vapour which well-nigh choked me now and again.

Suddenly, when the stuff had reached to my waist, from behind Saltcombe there came a loud sneeze and a hoarse shout. He started violently, lost his balance, strove to save himself by digging his sword into the pitch behind him, but he was too late, and with an ear-splitting yell he fell face forwards, with outspread arms, into the gruesome slough. So rapid had been the change, that I stared dully at his outstretched form, kicking and struggling, and already beginning to sink a little, but Simon's voice roused me.

'Quick, lad, quick, make use of him, he will give you footing.'

I saw his meaning, and straightway gripped one of Saltcombe's arms and dragged him towards me. He could not well resist for he had no purchase, and soon I had hold of his shoulder, and then I can scarce bear to think upon what followed.

If you have ever seen two flies which have stuck fast in the preserves, you may have noted how the one strives to obtain a mastery over the other, and by aid of his body to clamber out of the sticky mess. You may have watched how their little legs work, and how, with their feeble strength, they tear at each other, till at last one is pushed below the surface, and chokes and perishes, while the victor reaches the edge of the bowl and so escapes.

Even such a struggle has something of horror in it, but how fearful is it when two strong men know that one must die if the other is to get free and when, instead of a sweet stickiness, they fight and wrestle in a black and filthy mess amongst the fumes of sulphur and of pitch? So it was with Ned Saltcombe and myself, and for a time the end seemed doubtful, for if he was lying flat, yet I had been hard gripped by the slough and was wearied by my tussle with the dog. He grasped me round the body and I had to squeeze his wind-pipe till he let me go, but at last, with a desperate effort, I loosened myself a little and crawled towards the edge by holding on to him and working along him as one might work along a bar. More dead than alive, I managed to seize the butt of the pike Simon held out to me, and with a mighty heave he dragged me out. I fell panting, besmeared from head to foot upon the firm pitch. How long I lay thus I know not, but I could hear Simon speaking to me and striving to rouse me and after what seemed a long time I rose to my feet by his help and stood shaking like one stricken with a palsy.

'Simon,' I cried, 'can it be you who has saved me?'

'Even so, Jeremy. Dost think I am a ghost? Beshrew me if I have ever seen anything like this in all my fifty years of life. But who comes yonder?'

'Quick,' said I, 'they are Spaniards. We must away; but whither can we fly?'

'This way, lad, this way, for we are not a mile from the sea and as tight a little craft as I have ever sailed in. But look what you have come from, lad?'

I turned and gazed at the fearful slough I had just left, and then shuddered and turned away, for there was nothing to be seen above its hideous surface but a broad and hairy back and a couple of feet most elegantly shod in yellow leather, soiled and dirtied by the pitch. At the same moment the Spaniards, with whom were some of the crew of the *Dragon*, saw us and set up a shout.

'We must make haste,' said Simon. 'I will help you if you have no strength to run, but 'tis not far and there is a way to the shore. You had best take the sword, though.'

'Why,' I shouted joyfully, picking it up, 'as I live, it is mine own.'

'All the better, lad, it has a knack of turning up, but hurry, hurry!'

With this we started off, and soon it became a race for the road between us and the Spaniards. They ran along the margin of the lake while we ran across it, and the chance of safety gave wings to my feet, and I kept up with Simon, despite his long legs.

We were but thirty yards in front of the dons when we reached the road where it joined the lake, and our pursuers lost time by firing a fruitless volley at us. The road was merely a rude path, coated with pitch, which wound through the dense woods, but it was fairly clear of creepers and of logs, and so we made good progress. For all that, the Spaniards, being fresher, gained upon us, so that at the end of half-a-mile the foremost of them were but twenty yards behind. They were armed with spears and hatchets, and followed us with a great clamour at times; but we saved our breaths and ran for dear life, and a strange sight I must have been, bareheaded, smeared to the waist with a grey mud, for the pitch does not blacken, torn, scratched and bleeding, dishevelled, and in rags.

On we rushed, and I found it hard to keep up with Simon, but he suited his pace to mine, and we kept together. At last we came to a place where the black road took a sharp turn to the right, and following it we came upon a strange sight. A dozen men in every manner of dress were, despite the heat, playing leap-a-back quietly, but, for all that, as merrily as any pack of schoolboys. Their muskets and other weapons leaned against some convenient tree trunks,

and they were so intent upon the game, that for a moment they did not notice us, the road of pitch, which I opined to be an overflowing of the lake, deadening the sound of our approach.

Thus it came about that they knew nothing of our presence till Simon gave vent to a loud 'hist,' and then at any other time it would have been laughable to see them.

At Simon's signal they scarce looked at us, but sprang to their weapons, all save one, who, kneeling down, as is the fashion in the game, had not heard Simon's 'hist,' and stood in the middle of the road as though taken with inward pains, his hands upon his knees, no doubt wondering why a comrade did not leap over him.

We never slackened our pace, and Simon signed to those who had picked up their arms, and as he ran, pointed behind him.

They were men I found thereafter who had faced many a danger, and, therefore, without a word, they vanished into the wood and lay in ambush. Meanwhile, Simon, coming upon the strange form on the road, and finding him a small man and a light one, lost no time, but seizing him by his breeches and the scruff of his neck, with a mighty heave hurled him behind a thick bush bearing white flowers which stood by the roadside. The man made little sound in falling, and afterwards I found that Simon accounted this a lucky chance, for the little man was minded to dispute his leadership, having a great mind and much ambition for so small a body. Scarce had he vanished behind the bush, and Simon and I got under way again, when round the corner came the Spaniards, six of them together, and they gave a shout when they found they had gained upon us. It was the last they ever uttered, for next moment they were opposite the ambuscade, there was a flash and crackle, and six forms lay stretched upon the black pitch, forming no very pleasant sight for other two of the rascals who suddenly came upon the scene. Scarce had they done so when Simon's men came upon them, and as they were stout fellows, and got their backs set against the tree stems, there was straightway some lively work with sword and hatchet, while the rest of the pursuers, with whom were some of the *Dragon's* crew, thinking that Simon and I had turned at

bay, came briskly round the corner, but being suddenly charged by a new enemy, they turned and fled up the road again, leaving two dead men behind them, and one of these, I grieve to say it, an Englishman ; but so much for bad company, as the proverb hath it.

As for me, when I saw all danger was past for the nonce, I threw myself upon the ground and lay hot and panting, striving to regain my breath, for it, and with it my strength was well-nigh gone, and I had taken a sharp pain in the side as though some monster had seized upon my vitals with crushing grasp. Simon, on the other hand, turned, and was soon at it with the pike, but I noticed little of the fight, and felt for a time as though I must die ; yet, ere the Spaniards fled, the breath came back to me, and I was able to speak when Simon and his men found time to look after me. So shaky was I, and so tottering my legs, that without ado they raised me, and carried them with me to the shore, and so strange are a man's thoughts, that I can call to mind that as they bore me amongst them I wondered only that the little man whom Simon had thrown out of his way looked not a whit downcast, but made merry over it, as though it were a jest, for I knew that had any man served me in such a fashion, that is, if any man could, I had not been best pleased and would have turned upon him.

It was but a short way to the beach, which, like the road-way, was of pitch, against which the sea lapped, leaving a shiny wetness upon it and gliding from off it as water trickles from a duck's back. I was bundled into a small boat, and after a short row we reached a little stumpy craft and I was slung aboard and taken straightway below by order of Simon, who, as I live, looked after me as a mother looks after her sick babe or a hen her chick, and when I strove, being full of wonderment, to ask him anything, he clapped his great hand upon my mouth and threatened to choke me, till, for very fear of him, I kept silence, though not before he had learned from me that the *Dragon*, with Sir Jaspar aboard, lay to the north of us. I fell asleep at length, and when I wakened I found we were under weigh, and feeling a trifle better, listened to Simon's tale of all that had befallen since the *Donna Bella* and the *Water Sprite* parted company, and then I fell into a grievous fever begotten of the swamp and the terrible lake

of pitch, and perchance also of all the horrors I had passed through since I lay a prisoner on the *San Fernando*, for I had witnessed enough in these few short weeks to turn a man's head gray and his brains askew. Perchance, however, before I tell you Simon's tale and the manner of my sickness, it may be fitting that I say somewhat as to this isle of Trinidad, and that more especially as I became well acquainted with it in our search for the treasure of the skull, of which more anon.

CHAPTER XXIV

OF THE FATE OF THE 'DONNA BELLA' AND THE DOINGS OF SIMON

I HAVE heard it said, and no doubt there is truth in it, that this great island was so called by the Spaniards after the Holy Trinity, for the yellow skins, though great rascals for the most part, are yet as fond of prayers and the names of saints as they are of oaths and garlic, and therefore it is no wonder that, on sighting the three southern hill ranges after a weary voyage, they should have returned thanks and named the isle Trinidad.

Now, whether or not this be a holy name, yet to my mind the Indian name *Iëre*, or the land of the humming-bird, is more pleasant to the ear, for in very truth the country is full of these tiny gem birds, which, though scarce larger than bees, are yet like chips broken from off a rainbow, so marvellous are they in lustre and colouring. The island is, as I have said, a great one, with heavily-wooded mountains in the northern part, and great forest-covered plains and swamps to the south of these, save for one low and triple range and the cone-shaped hill, at the foot of which lies the village of San Fernando.

Many large and muddy streams run into the gulf, and besides the great lake of pitch there are strange hot springs, so that in very truth one might have good cause to think that the regions of darkness are not situate far from the island.

As for towns, there are few, if one, except the villages of the Arrawaks, who are a peaceful and pretty people, much skilled in the weaving of mats and hammocks of long grass. The north and south parts of the western coast come very close to the unknown lands of Guiana, and at the northern part, which alone I have seen, are situate the islands of the

Bocas at the Dragon's mouth, and there the currents run very strong and swiftly, so that there is much danger to ships in a light wind, albeit the place is very beautiful by reason of strange rocks, great palms, and mighty creeping plants. Moreover, there are in the gulf many kinds of fish, some of gay colours and others horrible to see, flat and hideous, while sharks abound in these muddy waters, and in the rivers are great lizards with claw-like feet and horny hides.

The Spaniards who have settled in this spot spend their days in search for gold and quarrels with the Indians, though some grow fruit and make profit thereby, for there is little trouble in the growing of it, by reason of the richness of the soil and the sun's great warmth. Now, what else there is to tell of this strange yet lovely land you will learn when you read of the search for the treasure of the skull, for it behoves me to set down in this place Simon's tale as he told it me ere the fever seized upon me strongly, while with many a weary tack, the wind being unfavourable, we stood to the northward to find the *Golden Dragon*.

'Nay, lad, nay, your tale will keep till you grow stronger, and meanwhile, to pass time, I will tell you mine, which is strange enough, though the strangest part of it is my meeting with you up to the waist in that filthy stuff, and the Puppy, of all men, gloating over your struggles. Beshrew me! but I wonder how he feels now.'

'Cease, Simon,' I said. 'Had you felt the grip of that black mire you would have nought but pity for him.' I shuddered as I spoke, for, as I have said, I was weak and spent, and ever before my eyes was a vision of the dog's great hairy back, and the two feet shod in yellow leather sticking from out the pitch.

'Well, well, lad, had you seen all I have since we parted, your stomach would not turn so easily; what, you smile?'

'When you have heard my tale, Simon, methinks you will not wonder,' I answered wearily, and signed to him to go on.

'After old Hocus had played us that scurvy trick,' continued the pikeman, 'we were kept hard at it, for the new masts carried sail but badly, and we crept along, like some great sea snail, to a mournful chorus of groans and sighs from the wounded and captive dons. Yet for all that the crew were in good spirits at the taking of such a fine galleon, and ceased muttering against the captain, who,

I could see, was much troubled in his mind whither to go or what to do, for there was no sign of the fleet, and there were a trifle too many yellow skins aboard the *Donna Bella*.

‘What resolve he would have come to I know not, but the matter was settled for him and for all of us by a great gale which burst upon us, and lasted three full days, driving us at great speed to the westward, and leaving us at length little better than a wreck again, with half the wounded, dead men, and the other half scarce living, while as for the dons cooped up below, their prayers and curses bade fair to deafen us, till old Hocus threatened to hang them all, and even that would scarce suffice to quiet them.

Now, this was bad enough, but worse was to follow, for at last we made land and cast anchor at the mouth of a shallow river with wooded banks in a wild place, where was no sign of man.

‘There was much talk as to where we were, for there was naught to be seen but forest and far away great mountain ridges and peaks, very faint and cloudlike. Most were of opinion it was the mainland, but none were certain and though we had up some of the Spaniards they could tell us nothing of the place, saying only it was not *Nombre de Dios*, the which we already knew.

‘The anchorage being good, however, and water to be had, we stood into the river mouth and took up position there, but that same night the Spaniards, seeing our ignorance of the place, took courage, and breaking loose, swarmed upon deck.

‘We were not taken wholly by surprise, for old Hocus was a crafty man and kept strict guard, but so great was the number of the yellow skins, that we only beat them back after a fierce fight, in which we lost half our men, and amongst them Gammon and Mortimer, whom you may remember as being great at the dice.’

I nodded, and Simon, after a pause, went on with his tale. ‘It must have been an evil spirit which brought us to that river’s mouth, for on the second day the fever of those parts broke out amongst us, especially amongst the dons, who died in dozens, for the most part in great agony with vomitings and twistings. On the fourth day old Hocus fell a victim, and seeing that, if matters continued so, the galleon would ere long be nothing but a great coffin, with twelve men I went ashore, leaving the sick and those who feared the

forests, and setting the dons free to do as they pleased, for the sickness had done away with enmity. We took no treasure with us, save that each man carried with him a store of ducats in case of need.

'Deeming it prudent to quit the stricken spot, we plunged into the woods and began a most weary march through the dense forests, across swamps and rivers, but ever keeping close by the sea, and seeking some craft to carry us from that unknown country. For three days we journeyed on, and two men who had the fever on them ere we left the galleon sank and died, but the rest of us struggled forward, though sore troubled by heat and stinging flies, and the uncertainty of what awaited us. We saw naught that had life but a few birds which, as I live, seemed filled with the melancholy of the forest, and for the most part sat with ruffled feathers and moping look, and neither piped nor chirruped.

'It was upon the evening of the third day from our leaving the galleon that we came upon an Indian village situate near the mouth of a great river, with stretches of sandy banks and a heavy line of breakers beyond its entrance, and our first knowledge of it being near us was the sound of pitiful cries, the shrieking of men in pain, and I knew well what these cries meant, for I had heard the like before, and had seen the yellow skins torture Indians to find the secret of hidden treasure. When we had come to the edge of the wood I found I had not been mistaken, but if there was a horrid sight before us yet we could have shouted for joy when in the river we saw a small craft moored, this very vessel upon which we now are.'

'Why, Simon,' said I 'your tale is somewhat like the one I have to tell you.'

'Is't so, lad? Well, that is strange, but—'

Ere he had done speaking, Simon threw open the door of the little cabin and dragged into it a man who had been listening with his ear to the keyhole, and to my surprise I saw it was no other than the little man with the merry visage (though in very truth all merriness had gone from it), whom Simon had served so roughly upon the pitch road.

'Mercy, mercy!' he gasped. 'I did but listen to hear if the new-comer were recovered.'

Simon said nothing, but squeezed the nape of the little man's neck, till, from writhing like an eel, he hung limp and

gasping in the pikeman's mighty grip, and then with a heave and a heavy kick Simon sent him headlong out of the cabin, and watched him as he picked himself up and darted on deck.

When Simon turned to me there was a twinkle in his eye which did not squint, and a little twitching at the corners of his mouth, and he gently laid his finger to his nose, after a fashion common with Englishmen, of which I have before made mention.

'He is a cunning rogue, Jeremy,' he said, 'and hoped to hear something to his advantage, but I warrant me his neck will tingle for some hours to come.'

'But who is he?' I queried.

'Softly, lad, softly, you shall know all in good time; but where was I? Ah! at the village by the river's bank. I must hasten my tale, else, despite the wind, I shall not make an end of it before we reach Sir Jasper, and if I remember aright there is no chance of telling aught when he is one of a company.'

'The Spaniards, as I have said, were making sport, for they had half-a-dozen Indians tied to stakes, and with sticks glowing red, taken from a great fire which they had lit, they were—but there is no need to say more. There was one of the Indians, howbeit, unlike any I had ever seen, tall and of a noble build, although he was old and worn looking. There was that on his face which told me his days were numbered as was little wonder, for these devils of Spaniards had wreaked their fury on him more especially, and he was scarred and burned in a horrid fashion, while one of his eyes had been put out, yet I could see that he scorned the yellow skins, albeit he said nothing but stood erect and still as the stake to which he was fastened.

'The cries we had heard had come from the others who, though in a sorry plight, yet were scarce touched as compared with the old man, and it needed but a glance to show they were a different people—Mosquito Indians of the mainland, as we found.

'There were some twenty Spaniards on the shore and more aboard the ship, but not another Indian was in sight and I noted with joy that many of the yellow skins were drunken, and that they had left their weapons in the small boat. I looked at the men of the *Water Sprite* and saw it was with them as it was with me. These three days of marching,

pestered by insects and half roasted, had changed them from men into demons, ready for anything, and here was their chance. I pointed to the dons, tapped the butt of my good pike, and a fierce smile came into the face of each of them, for they were Englishman good and true, and hated the brutal work of the Spaniards; then with a shout I charged out of the wood with the ten of them at my heels. Beshrew me, Jeremy, but it was a rare sight to see those drunken dons. They stood and gazed at us like silly sheep, till half of them were dead as mutton, and when the rest rushed for the boat we went with them, and, all fighting in a heap, we somehow reached the ship and got aboard her. Then indeed we had somewhat of a tussle, for there were ten yellow skins in her more or less sober, but having done thus well we were minded to finish as we had begun, and finish we did, for in a brief space we had rid the world of these great navigators and were masters of the *San Juan*, as their craft was called. Truly, lad, I think they never knew who or what we were, for, by my faith, we gave them little time to think at all, either of us or of their sins, which were many, I make no doubt.

'After we had made an end of them, we set free the Indians and all save the old man fled into the woods, being still overcome with terror, as, indeed, was no wonder. As for the old Indian, we laid him gently on the ground and bathed his wounds while we made ready a meal. All that night he lay as one in a stupor, but in the early morning his senses returned to him, and he called to me in Spanish and bade me sit beside him, and then, Jeremy, he hold me a strange tale, but whether a true one or not I cannot yet say, though, please God, we shall find out ere long.

"Listen," he said, "white man who has put the Spaniards to rout, I know your nation and that you hate these accursed, and therefore I would reward you for your deeds, seeing that the great treasure might otherwise pass into their hands, the which may the gods, if they have yet aught of power or majesty, forbid."

'There was a strange bitterness in the old man's voice, and a wild light in his one eye which made me wonder if his sufferings had turned his brain, but at the word treasure I pricked up my ears and listened to him closely, for his voice was feeble and his strength was ebbing fast.

"Listen," he continued, "I who lie before you am a warrior of the great people, the people of the white cities which are burned and desolate. I am of the royal blood of the household of the great King whom these thrice accursed Spaniards slew. My name it matters little, and I must make haste, white man, for the gods call me and the fires burn low. Suffice to say that I was born long since in a little city of the wild hills which the Spaniards had not reached, and there I grew to manhood, and the remnant of the people looked to me to drive forth the invader, to raise the ancient temples and set up the images of the gods, and I was proud because of it, white man, and my soul burned within me to do great deeds, and I longed to reach man's estate that I might summon the sons of the dead warriors and lead them to the fray, for I recalled the tales of the fierce battles on the causeways of Tenochtitlan and on the plains by the lake. Now, when I was come to be a man, the old priest, who with his own eyes had seen him whom they call Cortes the Destroyer, and from the heights of the Teocalli had cursed the men of steel, took me by the hand and led me by a secret way into a temple hollowed in the rocks, and there he showed me the great treasure of which I have made mention. Set upon a flat stone was a great skull, the skull of the King Montezuma, father of our people, and in its eyeless sockets were set two mighty gems, red and gleaming, which glowed a dull crimson in the light from a silver lamp. The priest prayed long and wept awhile, and then he laid hold upon the skull and behold the top of it rose and fell back upon a hinge, and within was a multitude of priceless stones, blue and white, green and crimson, sparkling with a thousand glints of light, and dazzling to the eyes. Now I cried out at this wonderful sight, but the priest, after bidding me be silent, blessed me, and then he handed me the great skull which he had placed in a bag of the Spaniard's making, and there and then he made me vow by Quetzal, by Huitzilopochtli, and by the bones of the kings, that I would rest not till I had driven out the accursed ones, or fallen and died; and moreover, he pronounced this doom upon me—that should I let aught come between me and the sacred work, then of a surety I should die in torment at the hands of the men of

steel, and look you, is not the prophecy fulfilled? But give me to drink, white man, for I grow faint."

"I gave him a flask of red wine, Jeremy, yet for a time I feared he would not recover; but he had a marvellous strength, and after a time continued his tale, but he would let none come near him save me, and he charged me to tell the tale to none save trusty men, and then only if it must be so. You will wonder, lad, how I call to mind these strange names, but it is in large measure due to our friend, who listened for a brief space at the door, for he has lived amongst those people and learned something of their ancient names and customs. I cannot well tell you how the Indian spoke, but it was somewhat as I have said, and he continued in this fashion,—

"Now I vowed this vow and they proclaimed me king over the remnant of the people, and for many days there was the tread of men and the clash of arms in the valleys, and the news spread and the wild mountain dwellers cast in their lot with us, yet the Spaniards, being fools and having waxed fat upon the spoils, saw nothing of it, for we had spies amongst them who told us all. Five of the jewels I sold for arms and the hire of men, but the two great rubies in the eye sockets the priest bade me never touch if I would sit upon the throne of Montezuma.

"Alas! white man, I was undone, and by the wiles of a woman, for I loved a maiden of the city and she gained all my secrets, even that of the jewelled skull, and then, having sucked me of my knowledge and befooled me, she betrayed the plot and the hiding-place of the skull to one of the Spanish rulers, who had been placed by him they call the viceroy over a city on the shores of Lake Tezcucó.

"And so the great skull was stolen, and the warriors, hearing of it, drove me forth, and the priest cursed me with many curses, and my high hopes came to nothing, but I vowed I should be revenged on the false woman, and the Spaniard who was called Pedro de Gonzalez. Now I have no time to tell all that befell, suffice to say that I slew that woman, ay, even as she shrieked for mercy, and the Spaniard fled from place to place; but I was ever on his heels, till at last in despair he took ship and sailed into the great sea towards the rising of the sun, but he knew not that I sailed with

him. And so, white man, we came to many lands, but I played well with him, meeting him suddenly in lonely places, when he thought me dead or gone, and ever sparing him till he grew thin with watching for me, and became old before his time. At last we came to an island whereon is a wondrous lake of pitch, and much forest land and great hills, and there, having wearied of my vengeance, I slew him and found the skull, and though full one-half of the gems were gone, yet there remained the great red eyes, and at the sight I took fresh courage and trusted yet to sit upon the throne in the white city of the lake. But it was not to be, for they found I had slain Pedro de Gonzalez, and they hunted me with great dogs till at last, for the sake of my life, I hid the treasure, and now, listen !

“There stands a great ceiba tree where three hill ranges meet on the northern shore of this island, which is called Trinidad, and you may see this mighty tree above all others, but it is hollow, having been struck by fire from heaven, and there, oh, white man ! there lies hid the treasure in the skull of the King Montezuma, and to find it—”

‘Now here, Jeremy, even at this point, the old Indian’s strength failed him. He gasped and strove to speak, but could not. I gave him wine to drink and chafed his hands, which were growing cold, but for a time he showed no sign of life. At last he shuddered a little, the colour came back to his lips, and he looked at me once more.

“‘Quick,’ said I, “what of the hiding-place ?” But he heeded me not, and struggled up till he was upon his knees, with his long, thin arms outstretched, and his white hair streaming out behind him.

“‘I prophecy, I prophecy,” he cried in Spanish, “and the words of my prophecy are true words. Listen, oh, white man ! for there shall come a race out of the north, a nation like unto your nation, and yet not of your nation, horsemen and footmen, a great multitude, and they shall strike the accursed, hip and thigh shall they smite them, and they shall drive them from the land of the ancient people, even as the accursed have driven out the worshippers of the white God. Behold it shall come to pass though thou shalt not see it, yea, it is a true saying, for I, Chiapas of the blood royal, have spoken it.”

'Now, Jeremy, so strange was the sight, that I gazed upon him with awe, but the effort had caused his many wounds to burst forth again, and the blood trickled from him to the ground, and formed a pool about his knees. I looked to see him fall, but what was my wonder when, tottering and shaking the while, he staggered to his feet, and uttered a great cry in a strange tongue, a cry such as one might raise on the eve of battle, and then he threw up his arms and fell backwards dead, to the great amazement of us all, and for my part, I have never seen a man die in such a fashion, and I have seen not a few yield up the ghost.

'There is but little more to tell, lad, for having heard even so much about this strange treasure I was not minded to lose it without an effort, more especially as a tight craft, well provisioned, lay ready for us, by the mercy of God. We buried the Indian at the edge of the wood, and thereafter held a council. Now, I was by no means fool enough to tell my comrades of this treasure, and I remembered the dead Indian's words—to make known the secret to none save trusty men—and so I was at some difficulty in getting them to sail with me for Trinidad, till I hit upon the plan of loosening a plank in the ship's bottom, and when they found she leaked they were but too willing to seek out the lake of pitch whereof I told them. So we groped our way to the southward with no further adventure, but that on a lonely island we fell in with our friend, who listened at the door awhile. He had built him a hut and made a garden, but was mightily glad to see us, and gave out that he is called Jonas Squabbles, and that he had been set upon this island by his rascally crew, but I misdoubt him, Jeremy, for he knows much of those parts and told us tales of the Aztecs, as the race to which the old Indian belonged is called, and when he heard of this Indian he pricked up his ears so that I deemed it wise to say little and to watch much, and I soon found he was bent on mischief, having a ready tongue, and being minded to dispute authority with me, so that I was right glad to serve him as I did, and, as I live, he will find it but a sorry thing to meddle with Simon Grisel, lad; but now drink this, for I must get upon deck. We should be in sight of the *Dragon* and of Sir Jaspar, if he is still in the flesh.'

CHAPTER XXV

OF THE SEARCH FOR THE TREASURE OF THE SKULL

NOW, though I have set all this down in order so that one may read plainly and understand the while, yet I had but a vague notion of Simon's tale at that time, for all the while he spoke with me the fever was creeping upon me and gripping me more and more, though, soothed by his drawling voice, I lay still and quiet. After he left me, however, I grew quickly worse, now taken with a hot fit, and anon with a cold shivering, while my senses wandered and I saw horrid sights, and, above all, a most vile delusion which well-nigh drove me mad. For as I lay upon my back, the fancy took me that great winged beetles, of which there were many in the cabin, came one by one to the beam above my head, and strove to fall into my mouth, so that in a horror I spat at them and covered my lips with my hands, yet over they came, brown and black, with hairy, jointed legs, and long feelers which waved as if to signal others to the game.

How long I lay thus I cannot tell, but at last, overcome by my terror of these roaches, I rushed on deck half clad, and in a raging fever, and the first thing I saw there was the *Dragon* but a few yards away, and on her poop no other than Sir Jaspar, strutting like a bantam and waving a kerchief to us, and at the sight I laughed long and loud, and would have leaped into the sea had they not hurried me below and bound me down, and for three days I lay without sense or feeling, and then came back to life weak as a child, but with a great hunger upon me and the fever gone from my flesh. Then Simon told me all that had happened when I lay sick, and I found that my seeing Sir Jaspar on the deck of the *Dragon* had been no fancy, for the little knight, after I left him, had made friends with the jailor, and the two of them had

mounted to the poop, and then Sir Jaspar had made a speech, the like of which none on board had ever heard before, for half the crew were sore with laughter, and the other half helpless with wonder, and so in the end, after they found that the dead man whom I had stumbled over had not come to his death by any violence of mine, they made Sir Jaspar captain in place of Saltcombe, and he was about to start in search of me when the *San Juan* hove in sight, and so all things had ended happily. Moreover, I found that the two craft now lay at anchor off Port d'Espagne, along with the galleon which had come there as Saltcombe had commanded, and none were over-grieved to hear of his loss, but the Spaniards, being in mortal fear of us, had made us presents, and were perforce friendly. All were in good spirits save Simon, for Jonas Squabbles had escaped ashore, and he feared that this rogue knew somewhat concerning the treasure. This being so, we told Sir Jaspar the tale, for we accounted him a trusty man despite his fopperies, and finally resolved to seek for it as soon as might be. Picking out five-and-twenty good men who were willing to follow us on a private venture, we embarked on board the *Francis*, as we re-named the barque, and bade farewell to the *Golden Dragon*, which set sail for England, the crew being wearied of the long voyage and enriched by the ransom paid for Don Gomez and the company of the *San Fernando*, which latter vessel Don Gomez bought back and continued on his way to Guiana, being stout-hearted and not easily turned from his purpose.

Then, having kept our secret well, we sailed northwards through the Bocas, but the wind failing, the currents of which I have made mention drove us ashore, and the rocks boring a hole in the ship's bottom, we lost five men by drowning, to our great sorrow ; but though much down-hearted at this sad beginning, we set out in search of the ceiba tree of which the old Indian had spoken, and the men with us had but a vague notion of our search, for we kept it secret. We soon found it was no easy work to make our way through the forests, more especially as it was uphill and downhill, now climbing steep slopes, anon forcing our way down into narrow valleys, through which dashed streams of clear water falling in cascades over rocky ledges, and foaming down stony beds, overhung by arching trees and creeper-clad cliffs, and mightily

tempting to the wearied traveller. It was a strange and beautiful land, for all that it was no easy matter crawling along its northern coast, looking vainly for a great tree placed where three hill ranges met. Nor were we free from misadventure, for one man, while chasing a little creature like a pig, fell over a cliff edge and broke his neck, and two others quarrelled, and one was wounded so that he had to be carried with us, and so for near a week we wandered on, but could find nothing of the great tree. At last the men murmured and resolved to march for Port d'Espagne, and though Sir Jaspar spoke with them and we made them promises, all was of no avail, and finally they bade us farewell and left the three of us gazing after them as silently and quickly they strode down the hillside and were lost to view in the forest depths.

'They are foolish fellows,' said Sir Jaspar, 'for the dons are ever fickle and may clap them all in prison now that the *Dragon* has left.'

'That is so,' answered Simon, 'but methinks we do well without them, for though honest wights enough, yet none can say what effect the jewelled skull might have had upon them. I have seen a very worthy fellow turn thief for less.'

'I fear I am somewhat to blame,' said I, 'for they must have found it no easy work to help me at the first, but truly I could scarce set one leg before another.'

'Nay, nay,' said Simon, 'that had naught to do wi't, for you have been as lively as a cricket for two days now, and there was no grumbling till yestere'en. They but tired of searching, for they knew not what, and, for my part, I do not wonder at it.'

'Nor I,' quoth Sir Jaspar, 'for, by my head, this blessed tree looks as if 'twould prove a myth, while these forests are no myth but a very stern reality.'

'Well,' said I, 'there is not much more of this coast line to traverse, I opine, and if we find the treasure we find it, and if not—'

'Then shall I crack both your skulls,' laughed Sir Jaspar, 'for you brought me upon this wild skull chase, and God knows where it will end; howbeit, we have come through much together, and are likely to come through more. Gad! had I flask of Burgundy I would drink to our good comradeship, as it is—'

'You will sound your nose beyond a doubt,' said I.

'Right, Solon, right,' quoth the little knight, and favoured us with what he termed his graceful art, his highest and best melody, but what Simon called a noise, like the blusterings of a young hoodie crow, or, as we name it in Fife, a corbie.'

That night we camped in a little hollow freed from trees and made a most excellent supper from one of these little pig-like beasts of which I have made mention, and very sweet they are to the taste and much loved by the Spaniards, who, if they make saints of strange folks, make gods of their bellies, but have a most unholy love of garlic, the which is ever an abomination to me.

The forests were much more plentifully filled with creatures than those of San Domingo, there being deer of several kinds, but of a small size, monkeys, and wild pigs, also cat-like creatures, not large but very fierce, and dangerous to an unarmed man. Moreover, there were birds in plenty, and of snakes not a few, and particularly a little serpent of a bright red hue, very pretty to see but most deadly in its bite. Albeit I have made no mention of it, we had passed through one village of the Indians, and found them peaceable folk, very curious, slight in stature, but graceful withal, and expert at killing deer. They could tell us nothing of the great tree, however, and so we tarried but a day with them, and left them much pleased by gifts of bright-coloured cloth and a few plates from an old breastpiece.

And now we three were alone together, and for my part I would not have wished for better comrades. Simon, as he sat by the camp-fire, made a strange picture. His uncouth figure was bowed over his beloved pike shaft, which he was warping round with a coarse fibred creeper, his long legs were crossed, and the firelight shone upon his keen, sharp face, and showed up his hawk's beak of a nose and squinting eye. He had but little hair upon his head, and what there was lay in long grey wisps across his scalp, for his steel cap was lying by him. He was whistling softly to himself the tune of some old war-song, and the merry notes seemed out of place with his grave, wrinkled face and spare, gaunt frame.

In very truth they had come better from Sir Jaspar, who lay upon his back with his hands clasped across his paunch,

for, despite heat and heavy marches, the little knight had grown fat. His moustachios was, as of yore, well greased, and he had grown a tiny pointed beard upon his chin, and was mightily proud thereof, though for my part I admired it little. He had got himself up in some finery of Ned Saltcombe's, which he had cut down to suit him, and a queer figure he made in velvet doublet, with pointed lace on sleeves and collar, a ruff and purple trunk hose, ill-fitting and stained with travel. For all that he was as merry as ever, and would have talked without ceasing had we let him, and, as it was, he spoke twice as much as both of us together, and all to no purpose, save that it passed time and kept us in good humour.

As for me, I sat with my back to a tree stem, squat as ever, and perchance a trifle thicker across the shoulders than when I left Plymouth town, and in years I might have been older than Sir Jaspar, were one to judge from the dark beard I had grown, and my manner. It was no wonder, for few men, I wot, have in such a space of time passed through what I had undergone since I had shaken the dust of Kirktown from off my feet.

That night I fell into a gloomy mood, and yet I know not why, for I had a goodly supper within me, two trusty comrades, and mine own good sword for company, and not a touch of fever in my frame. Yet for all that, my thoughts were far away, and I fell to wishing I were home again, and though I would by no means confess it to myself, I knew full well it was not my father I wished to see, if, indeed, he were still in the land of the living. I knew that, despite all the strange freaks fortune had played me, I still hankered after the maid who had befooled me and driven me from Kirktown, and longed once more to catch the sidelong glance of her dark eyes, and watch her graceful figure tripping it across the sward at Crookness; to listen to her merry laugh and mark how her dimpled chin nestled in the ruff folds, and for a while I lay and thought of her and her pretty ways, till the crackle of a branch, as the flames scorched it, roused me from my reverie. For a time I lay and watched Sir Jaspar, who had fallen asleep with his mouth open and was snoring merrily, and I envied him his cheeriness and carelessness, and then once more my mind

ran on things which were past and gone, and I wondered what had become of Honeyman and Crawford, and thought of Bartelow and his punishment, and of the many men I had known who were no more, and above all, I sorrowed for Master Rogers, who had proved himself a trusty friend to me in time of need ; and as I thought of him and his sad fate I sighed long and deeply, and Simon looked up from his work upon the cracked pike shaft.

‘Art home-sick, lad?’

‘Truly, Simon, I think I must be. I would I were back in Scotland.’

‘Ha, ha, this Marjorie has you still, despite her scurvy trick,’ said Simon. ‘Have naught to do with her, lad, when we get back ; they are all false, and bethink you of the old Indian’s tale.’

‘A murrain on you, old croaker,’ shouted Sir Jaspar, who had wakened suddenly. ‘What know you of women? Your face would scare any maid in London town. Now, look you, Jeremy, women have made me what I am, and have made us three comrades, moreover, a woman has given us a chance of gaining this treasure, and as for this maid of yours, I doubt not it was but a jest to test you. Good lack! had I taken to heart one half the tricks which they have played on me, I had been as solemn as our friend Simon there. False or true, lovely or ugly, God bless them, say I, and send me a sight of some few dozen of a proper colour ere long!’

‘Your chance is but a faint one,’ said I, ‘for here we are without a ship full four thousand miles from England.’

‘Go to, go to, Jeremy, are you to turn croaker also? I warrant we were in a worse plight when our Lady the Virgin sought to have us, and yet here we are, safe and sound, but for some few hundred flea-bites and clothes fit for naught but a crow scarer. By my head! this pig we have eaten must have had the black bile to cause such melancholy. ’Tis time we were asleep;’ and with that the little knight winked gravely at us, and wrapping himself in his cloak, was soon snoring again.

‘He is a merry fellow,’ said Simon, ‘and were it not for him and the weed, lad, we should be in a sorry way, I fear, for these woods are as gloomy as a prison cell, but now, Jeremy, I would have your tale from your own lips, for God

knows how much truth there was in the tale which Sir Jaspar told me. It sounded like a fable.'

But when I had finished, Simon found that the knight had lied but little to him, and knew why I had smiled when he spoke to me, in the cabin of the *Francis*, of what he had seen and done. For three days after this we journeyed on, but could see no sign of what we sought, and we wondered much why the Indian Chiapas had fled to this part of the island, for the coast is wild with wooded cliffs and a heavy surge breaks ever upon it, but no doubt he was hard pressed by the dons and had no choice but to take refuge in the dense forests.

Our march was now a trifle easier, and we talked more freely, being by ourselves, and Sir Jaspar told us tale after tale, till at times I was like to split my sides with laughter, while even Simon chuckled at him, and what with this and the fact that it had grown cooler, our spirits rose, and three merrier adventurers it would have been hard to find in all the western lands. We talked of many matters whenever we halted, and amongst other things of swordsmanship, and so it befell that Sir Jaspar, calling to my mind my tales of the fights with Dick Honeyman and the French bully, challenged me to a trial with rapiers, and as he had boasted much of his skill and had slain one man, at least, in duello, which I had never done, I was in doubt whether to test him or not; but at last, being minded to see if he knew the old wrist stroke, I assented, and with Simon as judge we doffed our armour and doublets and set to work on a level piece of ground by the side of a tiny stream, after having guarded the sword points.

I soon found that Sir Jaspar was no mean opponent, for if he had not all the feints of De Cusac or the wrist power of De Papillon, yet he was as supple as the tree they call the bamboo, and his rapier glided hither and thither like an eel, while he shouted and twisted and jerked his body in a ludicrous fashion, but one mighty hard to follow. For a time I could hardly parry his thrusts, being rusty with long want of practice, but as the sweat began to come out upon me I warmed to the work, and my long reach stood me in good stead, so that Sir Jaspar left off his antics and was kept busy and upon his guard. I tried him a dozen ways, but he foiled me, and at last, thinking himself secure of victory, he smiled and gave me a little nod.

'Ha, ha ! Jeremy,' he said, 'what of this great wrist stroke of yours?'

'The wrist stroke?' said I. 'Dost mean De Cusac's?'

'Even so.'

'Why,' said I, 'there it is,' and with that I gave the old twist, and Sir Jasper stood empty-handed, with so bewildered a look upon his face that Simon and I roared with laughter.

'By my head!' said the little knight, and scratched the same. He picked up his rapier and looked at it, and then he looked at me, and then he whistled softly to himself and put on his doublet, nor did he say much for a couple of hours thereafter, only at night he told us what we had not known before, that he had been accounted the best with the small sword in all London town, and yet, he added, 'I am but second in this isle of Trinidad.'

'For shame, Sir Jasper,' said I, 'you take no thought of the dons.'

'Go to, go to, Jeremy,' he answered. 'I am content to bow to you, but as for any don—' He shook his head, and afterwards I came upon him trying to fathom the mystery of the stroke, but he knew not the trick which lies chiefly.—But that is for others to find out, and I must on with my tale.

For three days more then we held on our way till we were well-nigh at the other side of the island, and we marvelled much at the beauty of the woods. There were long smooth trees with greasy stems, others with curious tufted tops, and many, even of the largest, bore brilliant blossoms. On the hill ridges were rows of graceful palms, some bearing great green nuts, some without fruit, but all beautiful, while there were many of the huge ceiba trees, yet none like that of which the Indian had spoken. The ground was covered with long coarse grass and short-stemmed plants, twisting creepers and low bushes with strange berries and stranger flowers, under which lurked snakes and crawling creatures, and twice I saw those hideous and hairy spiders of which I had heard, and truly they looked like imps of darkness, being as large as any toad, and thrice as ugly. Also, though we saw none of them, there are in some parts crabs which live upon the land and the Arrawaks eat them, and, 'tis said, esteem them a delicacy; but this I doubt, for a crab without the flavour of the sea must be like an egg without salt; at least, so it seems to me.

Now I could write much of trees twisted and aged as any wizard, of birds of gorgeous plumage and harsh cries, of great moths and beetles, and bright shining flies which flit to and fro in the night time like glowworms fitted with wings, but I know full well that others have written of these strange lands, and, as I have said, I am but a plain man and but a poor hand at a description, therefore it behoves me to continue with my tale of how we found the treasure of the skull, and with it something we had no wish to find, and which well-nigh made an end of Jeremy the Squat, as shall in time be seen.

It was on a bright morning, an hour after we had bathed in a clear pool, that, on reaching a high ridge, we found ourselves looking down upon a wondrous scene, and what was more, found that at last we had, beyond a doubt, discovered the great ceiba tree, and at the sight we raised a mighty shout. Sir Jaspar also hailed the tree in wondrous language, and made us a speech as to the reward of those who are diligent, till Simon bade him remember that we had not come thither to carry off a huge tree, and asked him whether he knew if the skull was there, and if it was, whether the gems were yet in it, and so the little knight sobered down and rested content with gazing at the scene before us. From the ridge we could see beneath us three low but wooded hill ranges, stretching from a single point of cliff at the ocean's edge away to the southward. Narrow valleys ran between each, and away beyond the furthest ridge was a vast stretch of sea, the waters which washed the island's eastern shores and reached to the old world and to the unknown.

Now this was all beautiful and well worth the seeing, but what we gazed at was the crest of the cliff—the meeting-place of the hill ranges—for upon its summit, as the Indian Chiapas had said, there stood, solitary and alone, a mighty tree, spreading out at its top, against the sea and sky, long branches—which, even at the distance from which we viewed it, looked dead and bare—and we could see lying around this ancient giant of the woods other trees, which had been struck down by some bolt from Heaven, and were crumbling to fragments, choked by creepers and eaten up with insects. We did not see all this from where we stood, and it took us a full four hours ere we reached the foot of the great tree, for first we had to descend, then

cross a broad valley, where the ground was swampy and gave out evil odours, and then there was the nearest of the hill ranges to ascend and traverse ; but at last we gained the summit of the cliff, and stood awhile to gain back our breaths and gaze around us.

It was a wondrous place, and an uncanny one to boot. The giant tree towered upwards, clad with innumerable creepers, and ended in a tuft of rotting branches, dead and leafless. A huge rift split its mighty stem on one side, from the summit to some eight feet above the ground, where there was a gaping hole half hidden, as was the rift, by the climbing plants, and in it the rift ended ; but the tree gave forth a dull and hollow sound when Simon struck it with his hatchet at a part free from creepers. Looking over the cliff edge, one gazed down upon the sea, which thundered heavily upon the rocky shore, and left a line of snowy surf like an edging of white fur to a cloak of green. Around the ceiba, for a space of twenty yards, lay the victims of the thunder-bolt—mouldering trunks, some thick, some slender, snake-like roots and gnarled branches, all alike covered by the vines and creepers—while beyond rose the living trees, the dense woods which stretched in an unbroken mass away to the southward, covering the mountain-side and shrouding the valleys—a vast, leafy harbour, still and quiet in the tropic heat. We had need of care, howbeit, for the fallen trees gave cover and a hiding-place for numberless snakes, which rustled out of our way as we drew near the ceiba ; but they feared us more than we feared them, and we escaped them without harm, having become used to them and knowing their ways.

At last, then, we reached the tree of Chiapas, but though we were glad of it, yet we looked at one another in dismay, for the Indian had not said where the skull lay hidden, and we knew not whether it was within the tree, was concealed amongst the creepers, or was buried between the ceiba's mighty roots ; yet, having come thus far, we were not minded to return empty-handed, and, as Sir Jaspar said, 'it was no likely thing that any mortal had stood upon this spot since Chiapas had hidden the skull, with its gleaming eyes and precious store.'

CHAPTER XXVI

OF THE HOLLOW TREE, AND THE EYES WHICH MOVED

‘**I**N very truth,’ said Simon, ‘’tis a safe hiding-place, for what man would dream of wealth in such a spot? But how are we to find this skull?’

Thereupon we held a council, and resolved to seek it in the easiest and most likely place, which, without doubt, was within the tree; and so at length I, as being the shortest and the best climber, was deputed to scale the great ceiba, as high as the hole wherein the rift ended, and there to take an observation.

Straightway, nothing loth, I doffed whatever might impede me, and, taking firm hold of the strong creepers, I dragged myself upwards and was soon level with the opening, and this without difficulty, for the strong, twining stems afforded both good finger and foot hold, and would have borne a much greater weight than mine. Very cautiously I pushed my head through the hole, and took good care to glance upwards in the first place, for, if I am naught else, I am still, and ever have been, a canny man, as we say in Fife.

I looked upwards, I say, but could see nothing save the long tube of the tree, and the line of light which showed through the great crack, and having thus made sure that there was naught which might take me unawares, I turned my gaze downwards, and at once I started and gave a cry, half of joy, half of astonishment, for at the foot of the hollow tree gleamed two spots of light, showing through the darkness like two glowworms, two spots set close together, as the gems in the eyeholes of the skull of the king should be.

In my eagerness to see if it was indeed the treasure, I drew myself further upwards and leaned far forwards within the trunk, and then there was a sudden crack, the wood at the

edge of the hole crumbled beneath me, I grasped wildly at nothing, and with a smothered cry fell in a huddled heap down into the gloomy cavity. It was a fall of full nine feet, but I lit on something soft though firm, and quickly knew I was uninjured, and therefore began to get upon my feet.

But as I did so, to my fear and horror, that upon which I sat began to move, began to glide from under me, smoothly and without sound, and then with my tongue cleaving to the roof of my mouth, and a strange feeling at the roots of my hair, I saw the two gleaming spots, the gems in the skull of the king as I had thought, rise slowly and begin to glow of a brighter colour, and then as a strange hissing sound came to my ears, they began to draw closer to me, moving from side to side, while there was that in them which held me spellbound, unable to utter cry or move a limb.

Good luck ! I know not what I thought of as I sat there in the darkness and waited for what would happen next. I could hear Simon's and Sir Jaspar's laughter, and then they called out to me, but I could not answer them, being, as I have said, struck dumb with the horror of the thing which glided beneath me, and the steady glow of the eyes which moved.

How long I would have thus sat I know not, but my hand, which had fallen to my side, touched something smooth and cold, something which rippled in little writhes at the touch.

Quickly I passed my fingers over it, and they told me it was round in shape, yet I could not grasp it, for it was large, and lay, or rather moved, amongst other things of the same shape and feel, and they seemed heaped together, one gliding upon the other, noiselessly, but ever coming and going, and I knew they were the coils of some huge serpent, such as I had heard were to be found in the densest forests—great monstrous snakes, of mighty girth and length which were called constrictors.

Now, with this knowledge, my senses returned to me, and I shouted loudly to Simon and Sir Jaspar, and staggered to my feet, yet well-nigh slipped on the great coils as I did so. As if in answer to my shout, there rose out of the deepest gloom, into the faint light which streamed downwards from the hole, a hideous head, in which glowed the spots of light, and in which were set great fangs, long and curved, while from the mouth a forked tongue darted out and in.

I stared at it as it came closer to me, and then, fearing it would bewitch me by its baleful glance, I looked away from it, and there at the opening was Simon's face, and on it a look of horror, so that I knew he saw in some measure what had befallen me.

Next moment he was gone, and the next there came the sound of a heavy blow upon the trunk, and then another and yet another, and I knew they were cutting into the ceiba with the hatchets.

At this I plucked up courage and drew the dagger from my waist belt, but somehow it slipped from my fingers. I stooped and groped for it, but in vain. I could feel nothing but the coils of the mighty reptile as he unfolded himself for the struggle, to do battle with the intruder of his strange castle.

As I searched in frantic haste, I suddenly felt a touch—a something moving across my back, and then knew that the serpent was upon me, was about to circle me and crush me to a shapeless pulp. With a sharp jerk I darted aside, but stumbled and fell upon my hands and knees, and had but time to get upon my feet ere the monster could seize me.

Scarce knowing what I did, I grasped his thin and clammy neck with both my hands, and dug my fingers fiercely into his scales and strove to thrust away his head, while a wild fury took possession of me, and I put out all my strength upon him. To and fro he lashed himself, and I could feel his coil striving to encircle my feet, but hither and thither I skipped and jumped upon him, and tightened my grasp upon his throat. He had not room enough to seize me, being tightly packed within the tree, and his body rustled and writhed amongst the dead wood, and he hissed and struggled, while I strove to choke him and longed to tear his ugly head from off his neck.

All the time I could hear the thud of the hatchets, and I wondered how thick the shell of the ceiba was, and if my strength would last, and I called out to them to make haste, and was answered by a shout which thrilled me with hope.

As if the snake knew it was a matter of time, he redoubled his efforts and spun round and round, dragging me with him, and then strove to raise himself to the hole, but I forced him downwards, though my hands cramped with the strain upon them, and the sweat poured from me, while a

stifling dust arose around us and half-blinded and choked me, and a heavy odour filled my nostrils. I soon found that the fever had sapped my strength, and though I fought on and relaxed not my grip one whit, yet I grew limp and tired, and could do no more than hang on heavily and pray that Simon and Sir Jaspar were nearly through the trunk.

Gradually my senses failed me, the thud of the hatchets came to my ears in a rhythmic measure, and I seemed to dance with the snake to the sound of the blows till I grew giddy and faint, and then a feeling of great blackness came over me. It seemed as if I was whirling to and fro in a vast empty space, and when I came to myself I found Simon striving to loosen my grasp on the dead reptile's neck, and finding it no easy matter, for, as I live, I had driven my fingers full one inch into the serpent's flesh in my frantic efforts to keep his head away from me.

As for the constrictor, he lay upon the ground, his blunt-snouted head a battered mass, and his body cut and gashed by the hatchets, while to his tail was fastened something of a red colour, and as I looked at it, I laughed, feeble and half dead though I was, for it was neither more nor less than one of Sir Jaspar's kerchiefs, which he still wore under the ruff that had been Ned Saltcombe's.

Afterwards Simon told me their part of the tale, though, in very truth, Sir Jaspar had more to say concerning it than the pikeman; yet when Simon bade him tell the tale if he must have his word, the little knight merely chuckled and held his peace till he saw occasion for some jest or quibble. He and Simon had been mightily tickled to see the edge of the hole give way under me, and had laughed heartily at my ill-fortune, till they heard my cry for help. They feared I had broken some bone or other, and Simon had mounted up to the opening to see what had happened, and there had got a faint glimpse of the snake's head, and seen, as I had, the gleaming eyes. A moment later, he and Sir Jaspar were at work upon the trunk, and they were not many minutes cutting a way in, for the wood was old and rotting in many places, but when they had made a hole in the stem, what should come forth but the constrictor's tail, for the reptile saw a chance to uncoil himself in this fashion and so to make an end of me. But he had not reckoned on the

worthy pair without, for in a twinkling Sir Jaspar had loosed his kerchief and hitched it round the tail, and then he and Simon had laid hold upon it, and so in very truth had helped the constrictor to make his way out backwards, till at last, finding he came easily, Simon set to work to make the hole bigger, for, as he said to Sir Jaspar, 'I warrant we find friend Jeremy at the snake's head, and I would not be this snake for all the gems within the skull.' And it was as he had said, but they had to drag the last part of the reptile free, for as soon as he had room within, he had tried to coil himself round me, but they had foiled him, though they could do little more than keep him straight and cut at him with the hatchets. Howbeit, by the time his head was at the hole, they had well-nigh killed him, having broken his back in two places, and torn the scales half off his tail, and as soon as his head was free they fell upon him and made an end of him, and, as Sir Jaspar said,—

'By Queen Bess, Jeremy, I though you had reached heaven at last, till I saw your fingers striving to tighten on the brute's neck, and then I knew that there was yet fight left in you, and thanked God, but wondered what next you would do, for you are ever out of frying-pan into fire.'

'What next,' said I, gasping the while, 'what next? I opine the skull is yet to be found,' and at this they both laughed merrily, for it showed them that if my body was safe, so were my senses, and, to say truth, they had forgotten all about the skull and the treasure, being taken up with the dead snake, which was such an one as none of us had ever seen before, not even Simon, despite all his travelling.

Four-and-twenty feet he measured, and in girth, at the middle, was of the thickness of a man's body. His scales were large, and in colour he was of a yellowish-brown, with thick dark bars across the back and a little pattern like a latticed window upon the sides. When we had opened him we found the better part of a deer within him, and when I saw this, I thanked God the deer was there, for had it not been so, I fear me much I had been there instead, as these great reptiles lie sluggish after a meal and loose much of their strength.

It was strange to think of him living here year in and year out sallying from the hole in quest of food and climbing back again into the great lone tree to coil himself up and pass the

time in slumber amongst the wood chips and the dust, and God only knows what he must have thought when, in a huddled heap, I came thump upon his back and wakened him for his last fight. It had come very near being my last fight also, howbeit, and I could do nought but lie upon my back and feel my fingers tingling as the cramp left them, and long for a little peace in life, for a man may have more stirring than he bargains for, and I wondered how I had ever envied De Cusac his doings and adventures. Finding I was weak and helpless, Simon and Sir Jaspar raised me and carried me into the shade of the trees which, as I have said, bounded this weird and desolate cliff-top, and very comforting I found it, for by this time the sun had nearly reached his full strength and beat down fiercely upon us, while there was little or no breeze to temper the heat. Thereafter, Simon crawled into the tree and searched for the skull, and at last he found it, as I learned from the wild shouts which reached me. At first there was no sign of it, but after groping in the wood dust, he had come upon it buried deep, and as Chiapas had not lied to him on this count, neither had he deceived him with regard to the treasure. The eyeholes still held the great red gems, and within were others, thirteen in all, an unlucky number, as Sir Jaspar said, but we paid no heed to him.

Moreover, Simon found that the tree had not rotted equally within, but that a narrow ledge ran half round it, and no doubt it was by this means that the constrictor was wont to reach the hole, as, despite his length, I doubt much whether without support he could have raised himself so as to crawl out and reach the ground.

They brought the skull to me, and, as Sir Jaspar said, 'it was a strange nest-egg.' It was the skull of one who must have been a large man in his day, and the ridges for the muscles and sinews were well marked, while the under jaw, which was fastened to the upper part by silver, in the form of a thread, was heavy, and bore great teeth. The bones had been cleaned and polished till they were white and pure, but there were stains on them in some parts, and one especially over the back part of the skull, which made me think of the Spaniard whom Chiapas had tracked, and wearied, and slain. But if the skull itself was full of interest, how much more were the two eyes it bore, stones of the bigness of a pigeon's

egg, of a dark crimson hue, and with a sullen gleam, as if there lurked in them a knowledge of hidden things and of deeds of blood and vengeance. They were fixed in the eye-holes at the back parts as the under jaw was fixed, and the silver thread passed through a tiny hole in each, and was fastened cunningly to the bones. As Chiapas had said, the vault of the skull had been sawn through, and was fixed to the under part at the back, and so it lifted upwards and fell back like the lid of an ale-jug; and as Simon thus opened the skull, despite our knowledge of its contents, we cried aloud, for there was a gleam of many colours, and nestling in the little holes and crevices were wondrous gems, smaller than the great eyes, yet very beautiful. Sir Jaspar, who knew the value of such stones, gave thanks, and to ease his mind danced around us like one whose wits are gone, and then fell to picking out the stones and handling them gently, and gazing through them at the sunlight till he was satisfied, and then he heaved a great sigh, and whistled softly to himself.

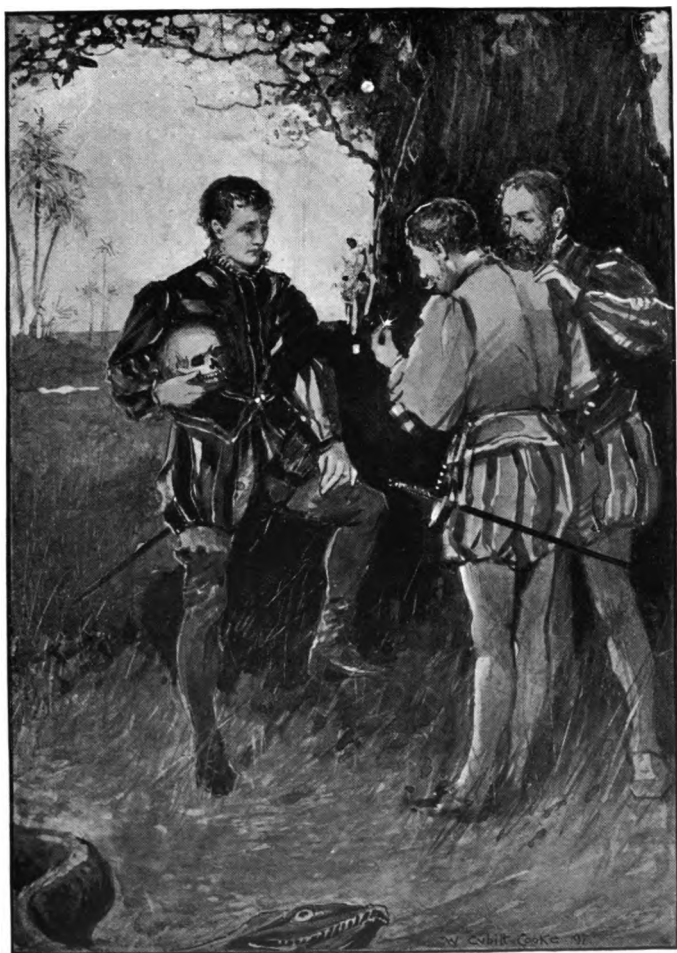
'By Queen Bess,' said he, 'I would this were London town and yonder water Thames, for this is a ticklish charge, and what with fever, dons, sharks and tempests, to say nothing of our having Master Jeremy Clephane with us—'

'Hold,' cried Simon, 'who is the gloomy prophet now?' and the little knight laughed and vowed that Simon had got the better of him, and then we all three counted the gems and took note of them.

I have said that those with the skull were smaller than the red eyes, and so for the most part they were, but in the great hole at the base of the head there was a stone which filled it up, being wedged in it, and this gem was the greatest of all, and yet unlike the rest. It was of a rounded form, and in colour was dim till the sunlight caught it, and then it flashed and gleamed in lustre like to a tiny humming bird, for every colour glowed in it, purple and crimson, green, blue and gold, shifting and blending as one may see in the great shells of the tropics, till one could not tire of gazing at it.

'What is it?' I cried, having no knowledge of gems, save the names of a few.

'Tis an opal,' said Sir Jaspar, 'but never has any Christian seen the like of it. By my head, Simon, you did well to save that old rogue of an Indian, and to think that



THE FINDING OF THE SKULL

with all this as his dower he was befooled by a woman. I have no words for him !'

'*Mon Dieu !*' I answered, 'is what De Cusac would have said in such a case. But what of the other stones ?'

'Here,' he said, picking out a green stone, 'is an emerald, these blue are sapphires, yet only one of the three looks to me of much value, the four colourless are, as you know, diamonds, this little red fellow is a ruby like our friends outside, and what this is I know not,' and he lifted out the last, a stone apple-green in colour, but like a pebble, dull, yet so vivid was the green of it that it had a beauty all its own.

It was in shape oblong, and its corners had been rounded off, while it was quite flat on either side, and in size was equal to a dozen dice blocks set end to end. I have often wondered since what the curious stone might have been, for, as you will find, if you read onwards, Sir Jaspar's fears were not without foundation. As far as I can tell, it never reached one who has true knowledge of such things.*

When we had made an end of turning over the stones, we set the skull down and made a meal of some dried deer's flesh, washed down by water, which we carried in leathern bottles, and which the heat had rendered tepid and unpleasant to the taste. I told them something of my feelings when I had danced with the snake, and we would have taken the skin from off him had not the hatchets made a mess of it ; nevertheless, Simon cut out one of his great fangs for me, and as I write I can see it fixed upon the wall and call to mind how the reptile's head rose into the half light at the sound of my shout, and I shiver as I think of it though long years have passed since then, and the fingers which grasped the constrictor's neck are thin and bony now, and are more fit to grasp the pen.

'We are rich for life,' said Sir Jaspar, 'an only we can get this treasure home, but we have need of care, and look you, I have a plan. Let us cast lots for these three great gems, the opal and the ruby eyes, one for each, as they are, I opine, of more value than all the rest taken together, and then each of us can hide which ever falls to him among his clothes, and should we fall in with Indians or Spaniards they will take the skull and the other stones, but will never dream of searching us, thinking they have found all.'

* Might not this strange stone have been a chrysopraz ?—ED.

'But why not hide all and throw away the skull?' I asked.

'Because I much fear this fellow Squabbles. What was his reason for escaping ashore at Port d'Espagne if he knew nothing of our search, and remember, he may have heard some legend anent the hidden skull. What say you, Simon?'

'I am at one with you in the matter, for our friend Jonas, as you say, knows overmuch, and better lose some than all.'

'Then so be it,' said I, 'but grant me this, that with whichever jewel falls to my share the skull comes also.'

'By my head,' said Sir Jaspar, 'art about to become a magician? What with the snake's tooth and the king's skull you would conjure up Satan himself, as we are so near his realms. Or is it that your brains have become over big and you need twain to hold them?'

The little knight laughed at his jest, and slapped his thigh with merriment.

'Good lack,' said I, 'an that is the best your brains can bring forth, 'tis time they were in a smaller skull, for fear they should go amissing, but now let us cast lots.'

Simon cut three sticks and held them in his hand so that naught but their ends showed, and it was agreed that he who drew the shortest should have the opal. As for the rubies, they seemed of a similar value, and thus the length of the other sticks mattered not.

Sir Jaspar drew first, then came my turn, and lastly Simon's, and, as the little knight said, 'Birds of a feather flock ever together,' for I had drawn the shortest stick and won the opal.

'Twill do,' said I, 'to stop up the hole in the skull again,' and then we hid the great gems with much care and circumspection, and I cut away the silver fastenings of the ruby eyes, and found in the doing of it that the cramp had left my fingers. After resting till the cool of the evening, I felt myself again, though a trifle strained and wearied, but as darkness had come down upon us, for there is no gloaming in these regions, we camped in the forest for the night. A wondrous sight the old ceiba tree made in the full moonlight, standing gaunt and weird like a lonely sentinel, watching the vast sweep of the mighty ocean, while the night wind rustled the tree leaves and made a low, moaning sound as though it were a wailing dirge sung over the mangled carcase

of the great constrictor, which lay motionless, still and quiet as the rotting tree stems amongst which it rested.

With the earliest light we left this strange spot and took our way to the westward, and, as we marched, we conferred together as to what we should do next. It was clear to us that the sooner we were afloat and bound for England's shores the better, though, how to reach these same shores was a ticklish question, but finally we hit upon a plan whereby we might not only leave the island, but might take some revenge upon the dons, for neither Sir Jaspar nor I had forgotten the doings on the *San Fernando*, and, as for Simon, he hated a don as he did the devil, and perchance a trifle more. Yet, for all his hatred, Simon we knew full well could on occasion transform himself into as good a Spaniard as one might wish to see, and, as Sir Jaspar said, 'as ugly a one,' and what with his knowledge of the language and the dye of a certain nut, it would have been hard even for Father Miguel's keen eyes to see that, instead of a rascally don, he was an English pikeman and a proper one to boot.

Here then lay our hope, for we were agreed to lie in hiding near Port d'Espagne, and if we found the crew of the *Francis* were in the town, Simon was to venture in and make known our plan to them, which was no other than to capture the first ship we could lay hands on, and then, 'hey for merry England,' said Sir Jaspar, but I thought of a land still farther distant, and a long coast line washed by the grey waters of a noble firth, and the straggling line of the little town, of which I had been, it seemed to me long years ago, the dominie.

It was a pretty plot enough, but there were not a few chances of it failing, for we could not tell if the men had reached the town, and if they had, whether they were still there, and for that matter we did not know when or where we might get a craft to carry us free; but more than all, the thought of Jonas Squabbles and his doings troubled us, and Simon, though he might make a good Spaniard, yet made a squinting one.

Still there was no other way open to us as far as we could see, and having passed through so much in safety, we somehow fancied that Dame Fortune would not now play us a scurvy trick, but as Sir Jaspar has oftentimes told me, the ways of women are past finding out, and verily they did well to dub Fortune, dame.

CHAPTER XXVII

OF THE SECOND TAKING OF THE SKULL

HAVING thus made up our minds as to what we were to do, we pressed forward steadily, and followed as straight a course for the town as possible, and we found it easier than it had been when we followed the coast line from the islands of the Bocas to the wild cliff top. Yet, for all that, it was no light matter, and had not the trees shaded us from the sun's heat, I fear it would have gone hard with us; but, as it was, we made good progress and had fair sport with deer and other creatures, having one arquebuse with us which shot wondrous straight, though I fear it would be laughed at now as cumbersome and well-nigh useless.

In the little rivers we crossed, we found that fish might be taken without much difficulty, and it was a curious yet cheerful sight to see the three of us angling in the early morning, and though I am a modest man, yet I deem it right to say that I caught twice as many fish as both the others put together, albeit we had sorry hooks made of bone; but if you ask me, there is something in a Scotchman, something in the setting of his teeth, and the grit that is in him which makes him a fisher whenever he has teeth to set and a chance at a minnow or a wily trout. I fear, however, that you will say, that is if you are a Scotchman, 'this fellow is hawering,' and wonder if I ever caught such a fish as you did in the fall of last year, so I had best on with my tale, for there has been more to set down than I had thought possible, and I begin to weary of the task.

Nevertheless, I would in this place make mention of tiny fish, scarce two inches long, which are found in some of the streams, and, as I live, swim out and nibble at the luckless

bather till he tingles all over and seeks safety in flight, thanking God the while that these same spotted rascals were not two feet in length instead of two inches.

Though we took good care to keep away from human dwellings, lest rumour of us should reach Port d'Espagne, yet we fell in with two villages of the Arrawaks, and Simon had much pleasant converse with them, and found that they hated the Spaniards every whit as much as he did, as was indeed no wonder, for the dons, in their search for gold, took and tortured many of them to make them reveal its whereabouts, and the caciques, as the chiefs are called, were mad with fury; but as the tribes are scattered and have little in common, I fear much the Spaniards have had matters their own way despite Raleigh and his doings, though I cannot say, having heard no news from these regions for full twenty years.

At the first village we reached, the folk took us for yellow-skins, and things would have gone hard with us had not Simon made shift to speak with them in the Carib tongue. When they found we were enemies to the dons they made much of us and prepared us a feast, and truly I thought I should have split my sides when Sir Jaspar returned them thanks. They sat and gazed at him with much reverence, while he babbled on in a mixture of every tongue he knew, bowing and waving his hands abroad and sounding his nose to their great wonderment. Finally they took him for some great chief, and would have had him stay with them and given him a wife, but, as the little knight said, 'though 'a bird in the hand be worth two in the bush,' yet I will have naught to do with dusky plumage.'

If he would have naught to do with an Indian maid, howbeit, he dealt freely, as did all of us, with the fruits, which were much like those of Dominica, and, as I have said, pleasant in the heat, but not of much account in flavour. At last, then, we came in sight of the town, which, though smaller than San Josef, the capital, yet bids fair to become the greater, being on the sea coast, and thus well situate for trade. I can call to mind the town as we first saw it from the eastern side, from a great hill ridge crowded with palms and a multitude of marvellous trees, some with great, heavy fruits and nuts, and some like mighty ferns, and I opine

that few men have seen a finer sight. Beneath us a broad, wooded valley stretched downwards to open on a plain, round which the mountains formed a half circle. Close to the sea and built upon this "savannah," as the dons call it, was the little town, the sun shining on its white houses, which nestled amongst a wealth of greenery, and beyond it were the waters of the Gulf of Paria, stretching away to the westward to where the mainland showed us a faint cloud upon the sky line.

To the southward, one might follow the western coast, low-lying and tree-covered, reaching to the cone-shaped hill of *San Fernando*, which seemed suspended in the air, and one could mark the point of land stretching outwards as if lying amongst clouds and vapours, and I knew that away beyond these parts lay the great, black lake, and in it Ned Saltcombe, with the dog for company. Very beautiful it was, but we had other things of which to think, and saw with joy a small craft, which lay at anchor in the bay, a ship with two masts and a high poop, as we could clearly see, far away from her though we were.

'Yonder is our deliverer,' shouted Sir Jaspar. 'I will wager you a ducat that we are upon her deck ere a week is past.'

'Please God we shall be,' said I, little thinking in what fashion we were to board her, and all that should come to pass upon that little ship.

That night we camped by the side of a small stream, which brought to my mind our bonnie Scottish burns, in the way it rushed and bubbled over its stony bed—here and there falling in tiny cascades, now flowing swiftly and silently, anon purling along with many a current and eddy where the swirl was strong and the channel deep. We dared not light a fire lest it should betray us, but we had sufficient dried meat to make a fair supper, and the night was close and warm. There we fashioned our plan, taking great care to work out every detail so that there might be no chance of failure, and we tricked out Simon as a don, and had hard work to make him part with his pike and take my rapier in its place, and laughed most heartily as he spat, and cursed, and shrugged his great shoulders, and vowed that, despite his eye, he was the finest yellowskin we

had ever seen. Then, with one as watch and guard, we fell asleep to a chorus of strange croaks and chatterings, shrill cries and whistles, and the many strange sounds which birds, beasts and reptiles give forth at night in the dense forests.

Now, here it is fitting that I should set down the manner in which Simon was, as we hoped, to work out our deliverance—for though it was but little of a ruse, yet, as I have said, we could think of none better, and had no time to spare.

Simon was to make a half circle, and come into the town from the southward, as if from San Fernando, while we were to hide in the dense thickets which lay to the northward. Simon was then to find out whether the men of the *Francis* were in the town, and if so, to get speech with them; and if they were at liberty, and fell in with the plot, they were to come singly, or in pairs, to a meeting-place—the top of a small but well-wooded knoll—and bring food with them, and then we should consider further the capture of the ship which lay at anchor in the offing. If, on the other hand, the Spaniards had made prisoners of the Englishmen, Simon was to do what seemed best to him, for he was no novice at such work, and it would be strange if he could not hit upon some plan whereby the crew of the *Francis* might turn the tables on the dons.

At break of day we were up and stirring, and bidding Simon God-speed, we watched him stride away down the valley, and ere he was lost to sight he waved us a farewell, and then, following the path as it turned sharply to the right, he disappeared from view, and Sir Jaspas and I sat down to consider matters, for we were resolved not to seek our hiding-place till nightfall.

We were in a shady corner, close to a clump of the tufted palms they call groo-groos, and the day passed pleasantly enough, Sir Jaspas telling me tale after tale of his life at court, each one more humorous than the other. It seemed that he had been a younger son, with no prospects in life, and had wandered to London. There, for the space of two years, he lived by his wits, and, as he said, despite hunger and dirt, cold and squalor, he had never spent such a jovial time, and I gathered that he had kept not a few folk in a perpetual dread of him and his tricks. Then there had come to him a sudden change in fortune—his father and

elder brother dying within a month of each other—and he found himself the sole possessor of a title, a small estate, and a fair sum of gold pieces. At once he altered his manner of living, and danced attendance on the Queen and her ladies, and what with his skill with the rapier, and his cleverness in the writing of witty verses, he soon became known, as I found afterwards, as a man dangerous to have overmuch to do with unless he was your firm friend, for, if crossed, he had a habit of using his tongue upon you, and if that failed, his sword point ; and, of a truth, if you escaped the first, you stood little chance with the second.

Heaven knows, he looked but little of a courtier as he sat opposite me with his legs crossed, working away at a bone which he was fast cleaning. To say truth, he looked more like a strolling player with whom things had fared ill, and who had taken to playing the poacher for a time.

His flat cap of purple velvet, set jauntily upon one side of his head, bore naught but the stump of what had once been a white and curling feather ; he wore the ruff round his neck merely to keep his kerchiefs clean, for these he washed every day with great care and dried them in the sun ; albeit, he had given up sounding his nose so often, there being none to hear but Simon and myself. His once gay doublet was torn and dirty in many places, but he had patched it here and there with portions of cloth he carried with him, and as these were of different colours and textures, and had served also to furnish a seat to his breeches, he was a somewhat odd spectacle when upon the march, and would have put many a mountebank to shame. Nevertheless, he was mightily proud of his costume, although he made a jest of it himself, and vowed he would appear in it at the next festival and set all London town by the ears.

‘Ha, Jeremy, my worthy friend,’ he cried, ‘you can hardly be said to have lived as yet.’

‘Good lack !’ I answered, ‘if much more awaits me I shall wish I had ne’er been born. Pray God I have somewhat of peace for ten years to come.’

‘Well, well, my Scot, everyone to his own taste, but give me a supper at the Bull tavern, a few roving blades, a half-dozen quill-drivers, and a fat man with no sense and a heavy purse, and I warrant you I will spend an evening to my lik-

ing, and yet walk fully half way homewards ; and though I say it, there are few can do better.'

'It seems to me,' said I, 'twas high time you made this voyage for health's sake, if for naught else.'

'Mayhap, mayhap,' said the little knight, shaking his head, 'but I came very near having all my ailments cured as the leeches cure them.'

'And how may that be?' I asked.

'By making an end of their poor victims, and the sicknesses at one and the same time, Jeremy, yet for all that I am well pleased that I embarked aboard the poor old *Water Sprite*, for otherwise I should have had a ticklish time ashore ; and moreover, I have seen many a thing worth seeing, though never a maid amongst them all. Also, I have made two very good friends, to wit, yourself and Simon, though, by my head, you are ignorant as babes unborn of manners and deportment, while as for the dressing of the hair, *carrambo* ! as the dons would say, a monkey in the woods here could give you lessons.'

'Truly,' said I, 'if your aim is to grow like one of these howlers, then I will even let my hair grow as it lists.'

'Very fair, Jeremy, very fair,' laughed the little knight, 'but who knows that we are not all monkeys who have lost their tails, and perchance a little of their sense also.'

It was upon my tongue to say that it might well be so in his case, but I refrained, though, for that matter, he did not heed banter one whit, and, moreover, I well knew he had plenty of wits, only they were apt to go a-jigging at times.

At last the sun dipped to his rest, and it was dark all in a moment, while a multitude of stars twinkled in the vault above, and the moon soared upwards, casting a silver light upon the whole fair scene. Sir Jasper and I were soon a-foot, and in a few hours' time reached our hiding-place at the foot of the knoll, and having nothing better to do, we betook ourselves to sleep, and did not waken till the sun was high in the heavens.

For two days we lay in hiding, nor did we dare to venture far from the knoll, being close to the outskirts of the town, and there being not a few Indians and Spaniards about.

Indeed, we came near being discovered more than once, and escaped only by lying still as mice, scarce daring to

breathe, as a party of mounted dons passed by, bound no doubt for the Five Islands, which lie some few miles within the Bocas, and are accounted pleasant places in the hottest seasons.

Despite these scares, we spent no unpleasant time, there being plenty of palm nuts to be had for the climbing, and Sir Jaspar took good care that I should be the one to lose skin in the getting of them. Moreover, being in an enemy's country, we deemed it by no means dishonest to make away with a pullet when we could, though of all stringy and sinewy fowls—let alone long-legged ones—those of Trinidad take first place, and that easily—at least, such is my experience. There were also many patches of that long and yellow fruit, the name of which I have forgotten, but which tastes somewhat like a pear which the grubs, by delving into, have rendered a trifle soft, with a brownish tinge here and there. These fruits we sampled freely, and found very sustaining, though given to reminding one that they have been swallowed by returning to the mouth an hour or so afterward. Indeed, had we not been anxious as to Simon's errand and the safety of the skull and its precious load, we should have wished for nothing better than a week of such a life, for, having plenty of the weed with us, we kept gnats and stinging flies at bay, and as snakes did not trouble us, nor yet creepies, we rested well content, and I bade fair to grow as fat as Sir Jaspar.

Heaven only knows what the boys at Kirktown would have said had they seen their dominie in such a place, ragged and bearded, but I much fear his authority would, like riches, have taken unto itself wings and soared away for ever, while I felt glad Mistress Marjorie could not see me in such a plight.

All things must have an end, however, and on the morning of the third day our stay in the little dell came to an abrupt ending, and in a way we had not imagined, for instead of capturing the barque and her crew, her crew captured us and in this manner.

About six in the morning I had, as was my wont, scaled one of the palms to get both an outlook and nuts at one and the same time, and having got over the cluster of sharp rough leaves which circled the top of the stem, I had settled down in some comfort to hack off a few of the great fruits, when

there came the crack of a musket from some distance, and a slug went whistling past my ear, missing me by inches, and so startling me that I came very near loosening my grasp and tumbling headlong on Sir Jaspar, who, at the sound of the shot, had come running to the foot of the tree. Instead of falling, however, I shifted quickly round till I got the green sheath of the palm top between me and the place whence I judged the shot had been fired, and then I looked about to discover who had played me this scurvy trick, for it is one thing to shoot a man in fair fight, and another to fire at a poor wretch on a tree top as though he were a corbie.

It was not long ere I found out those who were to blame, and a deal more also, which sent me scuttling down to Sir Jaspar with a long face and a heavy heart. I think I have not said that a bridle path ran through the thicket, passing some fifty yards from the knoll, and upon that side of it at the base of which we lay a-hiding.

It was along it that the dons we had before seen had passed, and along it a body of men were coming rapidly from the direction of Port d'Espagne, and of these men I knew but one, and that one Simon. The others I could see at a glance were Spaniards, and I counted fifteen of them ere I slid down and told Sir Jaspar what I had seen.

'God help us,' said he, 'what does Simon with them? Is he bound?'

'I know not,' I answered, 'but an we do not hit upon some plan quickly we shall be with them too.'

'Art sure they are not the *Francis*' crew?' he asked.

'Have the crew of the *Francis* black beards and yellow skins?'

'Nay, but this may be some trick of Simon's.'

'Trick or no trick,' I said, 'tis a good thing the rubies and the opal are hidden, but 'twould be a better one if we were hidden too. Let us into the thicket here!'

Taking the skull with us, we pushed our way into some dense bushes and lay at full length upon the ground, watching the bank of the little stream, by the side of which we had made our camp. The bank was littered in one place by the ashes of the fire which Sir Jaspar had put out at the sound of the musket shot, for we took good care to light a large fire only when the coast was clear, as viewed from the cocoa palm.

We had not long to wait, for we soon heard men bursting a way through the undergrowth, shouting to each other, and very clearly in a great fright lest they should be taken unawares.

Howbeit, as nothing assailed them, the whole crew of them came finally to our little hiding-place, and thereupon set up such a jabbering, and danced about in such a manner that I would have had work to keep from chuckling, but that there was that in sight which sent all thought of laughter out of my head. Simon Grisel was there, fastened between a couple of Spaniards, but not the Simon who had left us three days before. His disguise was gone, the staining had left his face, and in its place was a half-healed gash upon his brow. His clothes were torn and his head bare, but, worse than all, he was slaving and mumbling foolishly, making passes with his hands and smiling as an idiot smiles.

I stared at him, scarce believing what I saw, but there was no doubt of it, the pikeman was mad, Simon's wits were gone, and at the sight I groaned aloud, forgetting that we were in hiding.

'We are undone, Jeremy, my boy,' said a voice in my ear, and next moment we were dragged out by the dons and held fast. All the time I kept my eyes fixed on Simon, but he made no sign of knowing us, and gazed vacantly about, babbling softly to himself, and breaking into little bursts of laughter without sense or meaning. I was sore at heart to think that such a calamity should have overtaken my trusty friend, and for a moment I thought of making a fight for it, but on second thoughts deemed it best to keep quiet lest a worse thing should befall. In the meantime, some of the dons noted the skull which Sir Jasper held in his hands, and it was quickly snatched from him and handed to one who seemed to be in command. He was a tall man and very lean, his neck being as scraggy as a vulture's, and near as long as that ugly bird's. The skin of his face formed two little bags under his eyes, and was wrinkled to such a degree that one looked in vain for a smooth place. His beard and moustachios were close cropped, very black in colour, and contrasted greatly with his white teeth. He was clad in a steel cap and jacket with ear, thigh and arm pieces, and he carried a very long rapier slung across his left hip, while altogether he was the most curious-looking

Spaniard I had ever seen, being, to all appearance, half asleep, and not joining in the tumult. But I soon saw he was as wide awake as any, for, a squabble having arisen between two of his men, he suddenly turned upon them and silenced them by a single word, and I could tell that he had the power of making men obey him, a power which comes to few, yet which many think they have, and thereby fall.

He took the skull, glanced at it curiously, and I caught a gleam in his dark eyes as he noted the hinge, then without a word he placed it in a bag of blue cloth which he wore upon his back slung over his shoulder by a leathern strap.

This bag, I found afterwards, was for the purpose of carrying beetles, butterflies, and such like, for this strange man was half a soldier, half a scholar, and more than half a rogue, and a clever one to boot. His name was Pedro Bazan, and he was in command of the *Santa Maria*, as the barque we had plotted against was named. He was in search of Don Gomez, and had thus come to Trinidad and fallen foul of us. All this I did not learn till long afterwards, but deem it better to set it down here, as it is weary work reading without names to guide one, and a knowledge of the folk who play a part in the tale.

His men were the crew so common aboard the ships of Spain, half soldiers, half mariners, some Spaniards, others Portugals, and yet others from Genoa and Venice, a motley throng, yet with some sense of honour and a good knowledge as to the use of dagger and musketoon.

He ordered them to take away our arms, and then we were fastened as Simon was fastened, and when Sir Jaspar began to make him a speech he bade him be silent, and finding this had no effect, he caused him to be gagged, and then, having searched the place, and finding nothing further, he led the way out of the thicket and along the bridle path, and his men followed three abreast, save where Simon, Sir Jaspar and I each formed one of the three.

CHAPTER XXVIII

OF THE MEN OF THE 'SANTA MARIA'

I KNEW full well, as I was thus marched forth, that had I chosen I could have broken loose from my guards, for they were but a feeble set, with no chests or calves to speak of, though of breath they had more than enough, being redolent of garlic. As it was, however, all thoughts of making a dash for freedom were far from me. When I called to mind all that Simon had dared and done for me, I felt that I could never leave him in the dons' hands, mad though he was, and for that matter I had grown to like the cheery little knight and would have been grieved to see ill befall him. Thus it was that I strode along peaceably enough, wondering greatly whither we were going, for at that time I knew not that our captors were the men of the *Santa Maria*. Very soon, however, I was aware of it, for instead of going onwards to the town, we turned off to the right and followed a road which led to the water's edge, where two boats were lying. We had gone along it but a little way, however, when there were shouts and cries behind us, and screwing my head round at a turn of the road, I saw we were pursued by a body of armed men.

As soon as Bazan saw and heard them he hurried us on, paying no heed to the clamour, and pointing to the boats. Thinking that perchance those who followed might be the crew of the *Francis*, I took good care to give my guards as much trouble as I well could, and they found me no light weight, till they took to proggng me with their daggers and then I had perforce to skip on fast enough. For all that, those in pursuit gained upon us, and Bazan finally called a halt and set his men in two ranks, the first kneeling, the others standing. Then I saw that our pursuers were not the *Francis*' men, but another party of Spaniards, and with them

was the worthy Squabbles, who was shouting loudly and leading them on. But they had little stomach for a fight, and when they saw the firm front which Bazan's men presented, they stopped irresolute, although they were double our number.

Jonas Squabbles ran out in front of them and called upon them to charge us, but they stood together on the white road and would not budge a foot for all his outcry. Seeing that he had cowed them, Bazan ordered his men to retreat slowly and with their faces to the foe, and in this order we reached the boats. When the other dons, however, saw that the men of the *Santa Maria* were like to carry off both treasure and prisoners in safety, they plucked up courage and opened fire on us, killing one outright and wounding two others. Bazan, seeing that their fire must be checked, drew up eight or ten of his men in a line and poured a volley upon Squabbles and his party, and I was not sorry to see the wily Jonas go hopping to the rear with a shot somewhere in one leg, while two dons were stretched out, to all appearance dead. This angered them, however, and they rushed at us, and for a few minutes a pretty struggle took place, half in and half out of the sea, but at last we pulled clear, having lost two more men, while three of the land party were washing about in the shallow water, though whether wounded or dead I could not tell.

Bazan's men raised a shout of triumph as they rowed out of musket shot, followed by a few stray bullets and a volley of curses, amongst which I could make out some familiar to me, and judged them to hail from Jonas Squabbles, who verily had got little for all his eavesdropping, though perchance too much for his taste.

As I heard their shouts and curses, however, I feared that the poor lads of the *Francis* would fare badly, and, indeed, as far as I know, not one of them ever reached England, though perchance some survived to be rescued by Raleigh when he tricked the dons, leaving them dancing with rage on the shore at Port d'Espagne when they found he had slipped up the Caroni river in the night time and taken San Josef. But that is another tale.

I saw nothing of Sir Jasper or Simon, who were in the other boat, till we reached the *Santa Maria*, a very tidy craft

of some two hundred tons burthen, with twelve guns and thirty of a crew, including mariners and men-at-arms, and excluding those who had been killed in the fray.

We had but a poor chance of seeing the vessel at that time, for Sir Jaspar and I were promptly taken below and became acquaint again with the vile odour of bilge water and the washings of ships' bottoms, being shut into some sort of store room in the stern.

'By my head, Jeremy,' said Sir Jaspar, as soon as they had taken the gag out of his mouth, 'you are not content with flying from one danger into another, but must needs drag your comrades in as well ; since I have known you, it is small wonder if my hair has turned a trifle grey, for I have been as many times near death in that short space as I have been near wedlock all the rest of my days.'

'I cannot help it,' I answered ; 'but 'tis a good thing we are with poor Simon. I wonder where they have put him?'

'The Lord only knows,' said Sir Jaspar ; 'but they have driven his wits out of his head it seems, and yet one would not have thought it of such an old fire-eater as friend Grisel ; perhaps he plays a part, and has some trick in that long head of his.'

'It may be so,' I answered in a doleful voice ; 'but if so, he acts right well. I fear the worst.'

'By Queen Bess,' said the little knight, testily, 'I wonder if all you Scots go up and down like feathers blown by a wind. Cheer up, my Broad-back ! we have been in worse straits together ; though, in very truth,' he added, sniffing, 'I have rarely smelled aught as bad as this,' and he fell to blowing his nose, as if to clear the odour of the bilge from it.

This was ever the way with Sir Jaspar ; his spirits rose the greater the danger, and he was merriest when all looked black ; and thinking now upon all his cheeriness I can only say, as if he was still with me, 'God bless the little knight,' for I have met few like him.

Very soon we could tell by the motion of the ship that we were under weigh, and, as Sir Jaspar said, it was strange that we should leave Trinidad as we had come to it—to wit, prisoners—though now to dons and not to Englishmen.

I know not how long we were kept in the storeroom, but many hours passed before we were ordered to come forth.

Then we were brought before Pedro Bazan, who was seated in the stern cabin, together with a man called Miguel, and a huge negro armed with a heavy hanger. Bazan spoke with us in English, which he knew well, and we told him our tale fairly enough, only we made pretence of knowing little concerning Simon, and took good care to say nothing as to the great gems. He told us coolly that the spoil was his, and that he would hand us over to His Majesty of Spain, when, by the blessing of God, the *Santa Maria* reached Cadiz, whither she was bound, and he was curious to know our names, and showed great interest in my frame, saying he had seen none like me, and asking me whether there were many of my build in Scotland.

He asked us much also as to the insects and creatures we had seen in our search for the skull, and showed his white teeth when Sir Jaspar told him that we knew more of the insects' stings than anything else. Then he talked a long while with the man Miguel, in some language strange to us. This Miguel was unlike Pedro Bazan, being short and fat, with the smallest hands I ever saw in man, and little twinkling eyes, half hidden behind his bulging cheeks. He wore many rings upon his fingers, and talked quickly, while he had a habit of spitting freely, and thereby caused much discomfort to Sir Jaspar, who could scarce stand still in his presence.

They were both in high good-humour I could see, and Bazan seemed to have wakened for the nonce out of his sleepy state. He told us at length that we were free of the deck in the day-time, though he warned us against playing any tricks. Finally, he bade us leave him, and we were not sorry to go, for, though we could not tell why, there was something in the man which made us fear him. We soon found that though we were free of the deck we were not free of the negro, who kept close to us, and that night slept outside the storeroom. He was called Gabriel, and nothing would please Sir Jaspar but that he should dub him 'the angel.'

A very evil angel he looked, being a hideous fellow, with a great misshapen mouth, and but one eye—at least, one of any use, for the other was but a hard lump, of a bluish-white colour, very small and very horrible to see. But worse than

all, by some devilry he had lost his tongue, there remaining only a stump far back in his mouth, and thus his speech was like a brute beast's and we could make nothing of it ; but, as I found thereafter, Pedro Bazan had the key to it.

On reaching the deck we looked around, but there was nothing in sight save the blue expanse of sea and a shoal of these strange, silvery flying fish of which I have before made mention. The *Santa Maria* was forging slowly through the water, although a brisk breeze hummed and whistled through the rigging, and it was clear she was but a slow sailer.

Like all Spanish craft she was high-pooped, with a deep waist and a low fore-deck running up in a sweep to a little turret set at the root of the bowsprit, under which was a carved figure of the Virgin, after which the barque was named. A sorry Virgin she looked, the paint being blistered with the heat till one would have sworn she had the pox, but, as Sir Jaspar said, she was a trifle better than the Lady of iron, which I think, I have not said, was broken into a hundred pieces by the English mariners when they boarded the *San Fernando*. They had found her hidden in the hold with the blood marks yet on the knives, and had made short work of her, being maddened by Sir Jaspar's tale.

To return to the *Santa Maria*, however, we looked for Simon but could see nothing of him, and I knew not what to think, and could scarce listen to Sir Jaspar's talk as he tried to make light of the matter. All the time the negro, Gabriel, hovered near us, nor would he let us separate, but kept us together as a sheep-dog watches its charge. His ugly face was like a mask on which one could read nothing, and he communicated with us by signs only, half of which were threats, for he had a way of lovingly running his thumb and forefinger along the edge of his hanger, which gave us a curious and most vile feeling in the napes of our necks.

Now, it would be but a wearisome task to set down in order all that happened on the voyage to Spain, for, as I have said, the *Santa Maria* was but a crawler on the face of the ocean, and the months passed, one by one, as we pushed our way through the sea of weeds which is called 'Saragossa,' and so out into the mighty deep and ever onwards, save when we lay becalmed under a glaring sun upon a sea of glass.

It seems to me better far to make mention chiefly of what led to as strange a scene as was ever witnessed upon the vasty deep, an event which made an end of not a few, and caused the *Santa Maria* to turn her snout to the northward and sail under a flag which bore for its device the lions of England in place of the castles of Spain, and moreover there was at her stern another flag, as will in time be seen.

To begin at the beginning then, to our great joy we saw Simon once more on the third day after leaving Trinidad. He was upon the fore-deck, mumbling to himself and gazing seawards, and we passed close to him without word or sign, for the great negro stalked behind us, seemingly paying no heed to what we did, but all the time, as we well knew, watching our every gesture, our every movement, and longing, I verily believe, to catch us tripping. Indeed, fearing lest he should have a knowledge of English, we scarce dared speak above a whisper, and took good care to say nothing of the great jewels which yet remained safely hidden.

As for the skull and the rest of the treasure, we saw nothing of either, though Pedro Bazan had us many a time before him and conversed freely with us. He talked right well and showed great knowledge of many things, but especially desired to be informed as to England, her towns and fortresses, her harbours and shipping, and a multitude of other things, though so cleverly did he speak, that one would almost have sworn he was imparting the knowledge to Sir Jaspar, and not Sir Jaspar to him. And yet even now, when I think of all Sir Jaspar told him, I can scarce refrain from laughter, I that should be thinking of other matters, and least of all, of those things long past. Be that as it may, however, I smile to myself when I think how the little knight tried to befool this solemn don, for he told him the most astonishing lies with the face of a saint and the innocence of a young maid.

Good lack! I had hard work at times to keep my countenance, for even I knew that there were not twenty great fortresses along the Channel shore, nor that twelve three-decked ships of war hailed from each of the large sea towns. Howbeit, Pedro Bazan sucked all this in as no doubt he had once sucked milk, but what he thought it was hard to tell, for his sleepy, lean, and wrinkled face told us nothing of what passed through his crafty brain. Afterwards, we found

that he would fain have imparted all this news to those in command of the mighty fleet, which was even then a-building, that great Armada which, by the blessing of God, and the thunder of Howard and Sir Francis, formed much good firewood, and merry sport for wind and wave, and yet, as perchance you have heard, it was called invincible. But so much for the blessing of a Pope and the scent of incense.

The man Miguel was the real captain of the barque, and we saw little of him except upon the deck, and there, as Sir Jasper would not go near him because of his spitting, I perforce had no chance of speech with him, for Gabriel, the negro, kept us together as though we had been hounds on leash.

For a time I was in doubt as to whether Bazan suspected we knew more of Simon than we pretended to, but if at first he had his doubts, they to all appearance ceased to trouble him ere a month had passed, and he tried no longer to take us off our guard. It was no wonder, indeed, for Simon, who had a free run of waist and fore-deck, came and went with long strides and a bowed head, his lips ever working, and his fingers twitching, and passed us with a vacant stare or a stupid grin. God knows, I was grieved to the heart that such a sorrow should have befallen, and Sir Jasper, who had cherished hopes that all this was but a trick of the old pikeman's, lost hope as the time rolled on and we drew near the old world and the busy haunts of men.

'Is't not sad, Jeremy,' he would say, when we were shut up at nights in the storeroom, 'is't not sad that we can make no bid for freedom, and every hour brings us nearer to that cursed inquisition? I half envy poor Simon his loss of wits, for now he knows nothing of the weariness of doing naught to help oneself.'

'Had we but these poor fellows of the *Francis* aboard we might make something o't,' I would answer, 'but as 'tis, we bid fair to see the iron Lady again.'

Thus we oft spoke together far into the night, for then only were we free from Gabriel's hateful presence, though the negro slept without the door, and each night took good care to look in upon us, till in very truth we dreaded the sight of his hideous face with the withered eye and the tongueless mouth, the face which never changed but ever seemed to watch us silently but well.

It was no wonder then that, with such a strain upon us, Sir Jaspar and I grew downhearted, for if at first we had thought much of Pedro Bazan for his clemency in letting us go free without word of promise or parole, we soon found that such a freedom as we had was scarce to be desired, for if it kept our bodies fit and strong, it bade fair to make a wreck of our wits, and leave, instead of one, three gibbering fools aboard the *Santa Maria*.

When we would have spoken to Bazan concerning it, he merely laughed and paid no heed, though once, when Sir Jaspar pressed him sore, there came into his face a cold, cruel look which made us shudder to think we were in his power, and a fierce light gleamed in his heavy-lidded eyes, which told us that we had best call to mind the words of holy writ, 'thus far shalt thou come, but no further.'

As for Captain Miguel, he jested freely with us when in presence of Pedro Bazan, and spat copiously, and he took much delight in striving to reach Sir Jaspar with his filthy spittle, which was stained with the juice of the weed he chewed as an ox chews grass. Nevertheless, he also found that it would be well to keep within a certain limit, for having in this foul manner struck Sir Jaspar on the face, the little knight seized a heavy tankard which stood upon the cabin table and hurled it at the captain's head. It missed him by scarce a hand's breadth, and was flattened against the timbers, but it made an end of his spitting at Sir Jaspar.

Strange to say, Bazan, paid no heed to this affair, beyond saying something to the negro who stood behind us, and who seemed never to hear him, so masklike was his face, and this though I watched him closely.

The rest of the ship's company were, as I have said, of many nations and languages. There were two in command under Miguel, both men of Genoa, and without doubt good mariners. The others were a swarthy set, some good, some ill-looking, but none men of birth as far as I could tell. They eyed us curiously at the first, but soon ceased to note what we did or where we went, and it seemed to me cared little for anything, showing but small trace of worry, even when one of their number fell from aloft, and so was killed, and another died of some trouble in his inwards. Simon went

in and out among them, and messed with them in their quarters under the fore-deck, but he held no converse with them as far as I could see, unless to jeer at them in a foolish way and play them tricks, for I saw him more than once throw out his long leg and send one of them sprawling on the deck, yet each time, though sorely bruised, the fellow held aloof, and seemed to have a mortal fear of the tall, gaunt man with the squinting eye and mumbling speech.

Even yet I can clearly call to mind many a scene on board the barque—the wavering column of blue smoke which used to curl upwards from the little chimney forward, the group of dark-skinned men talking in a babel of tongues, here and there one fishing for the weed which drifted slowly past us, Simon pacing to and fro upon the fore-deck, while Sir Jaspar and I watched him sadly from the poop, and the negro in his turn watched us. I can remember how Pedro Bazan, and Captain Miguel talked together, the one sullen, and sleepy as any owl to all intent, the other roaring with laughter over some coarse jest of his own making, and squirting the brown juice from his mouth upon the dirty planks, while one of the solemn Genoese was ever at the great tiller, watching the fill of the sails and the pitch of the bowsprit, and looking for all the world like a graven image, so motionless would he stand, when the breeze was well astern and things were going quietly.

I say, when I sit here in my old chair, sucking at my good pipe, which, by the way, has taken on a very fine colour, it seems but as yesterday since I was prisoner aboard the barque; but ever as I think upon these days, my thoughts drift on to one clear, cold morning when, like a thunderclap, there came a change upon the scene, when steel met steel and the red blood ran into the scuppers to the sound of oaths and pistol cracks, a day which altered the course of many things, and amongst them that of the *Santa Maria*.

CHAPTER XXIX

OF SIMON'S SINGING AND WHAT CAME OF IT

THE weeks rolled into months, and the ship's bottom was clogged with sea-growths, and by reason of this fouling she sailed still more slowly, but all things must have an end, and so at length I noted that we were drawing near land, for the sea changed in colour as it does along a coast line, and a little shore-bird came and perched for a time in the rigging, which was accounted a sign of good fortune by the crew, and made occasion for much praying to saints and Mother Mary.

All this time we had sighted only one ship, but what she was I cannot tell, as, at the first glint of the sun upon her top-sails, Gabriel had hustled us below and locked us into the store room, and when we were at liberty to go on deck again there was no sign of her. Although I knew not what might await us in Spain, yet so wearisome had been the voyage that the thought of seeing trees and green fields once more was a pleasant one, when I could refrain from thinking of other things beside, to wit—the priest's cowl, the prison cell, and the tortures of the secret inquisition.

Sir Jaspar, who had been a trifle down-hearted, grew cheery, more especially at the sight of the bird, and having obtained material to write with, he straightway composed an ode to the feathered wanderer. To say truth, I have forgotten how it ran, but I well remember the writing of it, for the little knight was at least two hours over it, and I had perforce to stay beside him the whole time, and watch him clutching at his beard and running his fingers through his greased hair, for somehow or other he had contrived to get the wherewithal to anoint it.

Nevertheless, at this time I noted that the crew did not

seem in great spirits, but went about their work silently, and every now and then drew together into little groups, talking in whispers, but with an under current of excitement, if one could judge from the working of their face and their gestures. I know not whether Bazan saw anything of this, for he was busy over boxes in which he had stored many hideous beetles and great moths, but of a certainty Captain Miguel did not, for, having brought his ship thus far, he thought fit to betake himself to the wine bottle, and every night staggered to his berth with brains askew and cheeks flushed. I saw that the crew seemed well pleased at this, and especially one villainous-looking fellow called Alfonso, who bore rank as leader of the musketeers. He was a little man, thin and wiry, with long moustachios and a tuft of beard on his chin, and though I could not tell the reason for it, yet I had set him down as a rogue when first I saw him, though I had paid but little heed to him afterwards.

Having once gone upon the fore-deck, we had come upon him speaking in a loud voice with some of the crew. As soon as he caught sight of the negro he stopped, but only for a moment, yet when he began again, though I did not understand his speech, yet I could have sworn he had changed the subject. All this set me thinking, but I said nothing of it to Sir Jaspar at the time, lest Gabriel should hear, and it was well I did not, as you shall see.

It was on the second day after the bird had lit upon the rigging that, as Sir Jaspar and I were walking on the lower deck in the waist, Simon passed by us, and to our surprise, for we had never known him do so before, he was singing softly to himself. Thrice he passed us, and I remember wondering if the sight of land would by any chance bring back his wits to him, and then for the third time I caught the burden of his song, and it struck me as a strange one, for it ran in this fashion—

‘ Let Squat and Knight
To main-top go,
For blood shall flow
When horn doth blow.’

Thrice he passed, as I have said, and I heard Sir Jaspar mutter ‘ Poor Simon,’ and then I all but started and gave a

cry, for, as the old pikeman slouched past for the last time, I noted that his finger rested gently against his nose in the manner of which I have before made mention, and, like a flash, I knew that Simon had befooled us all these long months, and that his wits, which we had thought shaken or destroyed, had been working well and to some purpose, and that his plot was ripe. All this passed through my mind in a moment, but Simon was gone ere I could give a counter-sign, and perchance it was as well, for the negro Gabriel overlooked but little, though he did not seem to lay stress upon the placing of Simon's finger, as, indeed, was no wonder, for the yellow-skins have not the trick of it. I cannot tell the joy that little sign gave me, but I had to keep it to myself till we were shut up in the storeroom, and then I told Sir Jaspar. He would scarce believe me, and laughed at what he termed my folly.

'Go to, Jeremy,' he said, 'what is there in a sign like that? A mere chance, belike, and what is more, how could mortal man feign madness for such a time?'

'Simon is a strange mortal,' I answered, 'and has a longer head than either you or I, and, moreover, what say you to his singing?'

'Call it not names, 'twas more like a hog grunting. Poor Simon has no soul for melody!'

'Hog grunts or no,' said I, a trifle hotly, 'methinks his words—'

'Words!' whispered Sir Jaspar.

'Ay, words,' I answered, 'did'st not hear them?'

'I heard naught but a babble, and paid no heed.'

'Then what say you to this,—'

"Let Squat and Knight
To main-top go,
For blood shall flow
When horn doth blow."

'Beshrew me, but there is something in it! and yet, Jeremy, who can tell? Like the sign, it may mean nothing.'

'Ay, or very much,' I answered, 'but time will show.'

'True, oh, worthy Scot!' said the little knight, 'and, as I have somewhere seen it written, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."'

'Pray God,' said I, with much fervour, being a trifle excited, and having my hopes raised, 'that in this case it will read good in place of evil.'

'Amen to that,' answered Sir Jaspar, gently sounding his nose, 'but mark you, Jeremy, if you are right as to Simon having a plot in his big caput, it means evil for some folk without a doubt, and I pray humbly that our tongueless friend is one, for he has given me the shivers long enough, and would look well upon a pike end.'

'Who knows?' I said. 'I have had one man there, and perchance I shall have another before all is done. But what of the rhyme?'

'It is clear enough, for you are Squat and I the Knight, and it seems we are to climb, and is a warning to us.'

'Very good, but what of the horn?'

'Ah, the horn! Some signal, beyond a doubt. By Queen Bess, 'tis a puzzle, but hist!'

He stopped, for the key grated in the lock, and next moment Gabriel's hideous face peered in upon us and put an end to our talking for that night; but the words of Simon's song kept ringing in my brain, and though I could not solve the riddle in full, I was content to bide my time, and when the time came, to play my part in the unfolding of it.

The next night the negro watched us so closely that further talk on the matter was impossible, for we judged that he knew at least some English, and, as I have said, were ever careful in his presence, for we were resolved that if the hidden jewels did us no good, they should not benefit the dons, if we could prevent it.

It was on the second day after Simon had passed us, singing, that the meaning of the riddle was made clear to us, and I am not likely to forget that morning, more especially as I have kept it well in mind for fifty and odd years. It was fresh and clear when, followed by our sable guard, we climbed out of the main hatch and reached the poop. A merry breeze was blowing on our quarter, and the barque heeled over to it and hummed through the water with a pleasant splashing and bubble bursting.

Little green waves with white caps chased one another on the sea's broad surface, and the sun was warm and

bright. I very quickly noted that there was a look-out in the fore-top, and judged he was there to catch a first glimpse of the Spanish coast, but there was no sign of it to be seen, the horizon being clear to north, south, east and west, as it had been for many a long day.

Bazan was on the poop, and, as was his custom, wished us good day in very courteous fashion, and with a fine bow.

He seemed well-pleased, and a smile rippled over his wrinkled face as he bade us be of good cheer for our voyage was well-nigh over.

'It may be so,' said Sir Jaspar, lightly, 'but we in England have a proverb, "There is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip."'

Bazan started and glanced quickly at the negro, but in a moment was himself again.

'You are a cautious people,' he said, 'and the proverb suits you,' and then he turned upon his heel and walked over to where Miguel leaned upon the bulwarks talking to one of the Genoese. The other was at the tiller with a mariner beside him, and they seemed to have enough to do in keeping a straight course, for, though the breeze was a merry one, it was also a trifle fitful, and came and went in little gusts, so that much nicety and care were needed in the steering.

'You have put a flea in the don's lug,' said I to Sir Jaspar, and the little knight winked to me, but answered nothing.

We paced slowly forward, Gabriel following us like a shadow, and I noted that there were few men on deck, not a half-dozen in all, whereas of a morning there were twice that number as a rule. I was still wondering why this should be, for at sea one takes notice of every little thing, when from the fore-hatch Simon's head and bulky shoulders arose, and the moment he caught sight of us he pointed upwards at the mainmast, once, and then again, and as he did so there came from away forward the bray of a horn sounding throughout the whole ship, a strange noise to be heard upon the wide sea. At Simon's gesture, and at the sound, Sir Jaspar made a rush at the shrouds.

'To main-top go, Jeremy!' he shouted. 'The rhyme! the rhyme!'

'Have with you,' I cried, but I had other work to do first, for Gabriel, with a single bound, was upon my comrade.

He whirled his hanger aloft, but ere he could bring it down on Sir Jaspar's head I threw myself at his legs and, heaving at them with all my might, I brought the huge negro crashing down upon the planks, and next moment the little knight and I were scuttling up the shrouds, for all the world like two monkeys in hasty flight.

We did not pause for a single second till we were safely upon the little platform in which the topmast was fixed, and then we were some time in getting back our breaths ere we looked about us. When we did so we found that, as if by magic, a change had come upon the scene, and had good reason to be glad that we had gained the maintop. The waist and fore-deck were alive with men who carried arms and shouted and cheered defiantly at those upon the poop. Bazan, Miguel, the two Genoese, the helmsman and the negro, who was upon his feet once more, constituted the latter, and, with the exception of the steersman, they stood in a group at the top of the stairs leading to the waist, and I could hear Miguel calling out to the crew, though such was the babel of noise that what he said did not reach us.

Simon was upon the fore-deck apart from the others, waving his long arms like a windmill and seemingly taunting the crew, for whenever there came a lull in the shouting, I could hear his deep voice, and then the shouts and cries redoubled.

'God bless me,' said Sir Jaspar, 'saw anyone the like of this? But I am as dizzy as an owl.'

'Then hold on to the ropes,' I answered, 'we are about to see the blood flow, I warrant.'

'Bravo, Simon,' cried the little knight. 'By my faith, Jeremy, you brought down the angel as if he had been shot. But look, what is this now?'

From our lofty perch we had a view of most of the deck, though men and things looked a trifle small, and it was as if two bands of pigmies were arrayed one against another. For a time there was a babel of noise, and then I heard Bazan's voice rising high above the din.

'Back, dogs, back,' he shouted in Spanish, 'to your kennels;' and then his voice was drowned by another bout of shouting, though what the cause of all the turmoil was I could not tell.

Suddenly a man darted forward in front of the rest of the crew, and beckoned them to charge. It was Alfonso, captain of the musketeers, and he had better have kept out of the way, for Captain Miguel snatched a pistol from his belt, there was a sharp crack, and Alfonso sprang into the air and then fell face forwards on the deck. The mutineers, for such they no doubt were, drew back in horror at the deed, but as Simon's wild cries reached them, they uttered a yell of rage and made an ugly rush for the poop, firing as they ran.

I was leaning over, eagerly watching for what might happen next, when Sir Jaspar pulled my sleeve and pointed downwards and forwards. I looked, and there was Simon clambering up the fore-shrouds with all haste. The look-out in the fore-top had seen him also, and was clearly in mortal dread of this strange madman, who, with great leaps, was every moment coming nearer him. We saw him draw his knife, look this way and that, and then he took his stand at the top of the shrouds up which Simon was swarming, but ere the pikeman got within six yards of him, his courage failed, and as Simon dragged himself on to the top, the gallant look-out was scuttling down the lee shrouds as fast as he could ply arms and legs. The moment Simon had got a footing, he turned and waved to us, and then shielding his mouth with his hands, he bellowed out,—

‘Let Squat and Knight
To main-top go,
For blood shall flow
When horn doth blow.’

And with that he pointed down to the deck and gave a great laugh.

‘By my head,’ said Sir Jaspar, signalling in his turn, ‘I guessed aright, good old Simon, but beshrew me, Jeremy, there is some merry work going on below.’

It was even as he said, for a desperate struggle was taking place for possession of the poop. Three of the crew had gone the way of Alfonso, but against that Bazan's party had lost one of the Genoese, and Captain Miguel had a useless arm. Even as we looked, however, the negro sprang down upon the steps, and laid about him with such vigour that he felled two of his adversaries; but a moment later he was

driven back by force of numbers, and the crew gained a footing on the poop. At this they raised a cheer, but at once Bazan, Miguel and the negro attacked them so fiercely that they were hurled back into the waist. Again, however, they rallied and rushed to the charge with loud shouts. Right bravely did the little knot of men on the poop meet them with the cold steel, but it was of no avail. For a brief space there was a ring of metal, and men fell or staggered back, and then we saw Miguel cut down, the Genoese run through, and there remained only Bazan, Gabriel and the helmsman. The last named, who was a huge man in a red cap, suddenly left the tiller and joined in the fray, and so fiercely did these three worthies ply their weapons, that once more the cowardly crew were driven in a heap from the poop.

'Bravo!' shouted Sir Jaspas, 'the more killed the merrier for us. Pray God they carry on till sundown.'

'I trust not,' I answered, for at that moment the barque, freed from guidance, flew up into the wind, and in a trice we had the great sails cracking about our ears, flattening themselves against the mast, and then bellying out as puffs of wind caught them, and the *Santa Maria* began to behave like a drunken thing, now forging ahead, anon taken aback, her bow dipping to every point of the compass, while it was hard work to keep a footing on the main-top, and harder still to catch a glimpse of the fight. Taking a firm grip of the top-mast stays I lay down and watched the deck, but for a time could not get a clear view of it, the main-sail swinging from side to side with heavy lurches, and hiding from me what was going on below, though the sound of blows and curses reached me.

At last the wind took us abeam once more, and I could see the poop clearly. Bazan and the helmsman were still afoot, but the negro was gone, and, strange to say, there was no sign of him on the deck. I made haste to see that he was not in pursuit of us, but there was no one on the shrouds, and I wondered if he had been driven overboard. However that might be, it seemed certain that the fight was well-nigh over; two to twenty the odds were a trifle heavy, and I held my breath and looked to see the finishing of it. The crew made another rush at the steps, which were now slippery with blood, and I chuckled to myself to think that none of

the fools dreamed of reaching the poop by way of the bulwarks and so taking the foe in the rear, or, at the least, causing them to separate. I pointed this out to Sir Jaspas, and he laughed softly.

'So much the better for us,' said he. 'Ah! that Bazan is a good swordsman,' he added; 'he spitted yonder fellow in pretty fashion. Dagon! but the big man is cracking skulls as though they were egg shells. I would I were with them, Jeremy.'

'Look,' I cried, 'here comes your friend the angel.'

It was indeed Gabriel who suddenly appeared from below, and a second glance showed me that he carried the skull in one hand. We saw him hold it up so that the crew might see it, and then he laughed aloud as they yelled back at him, and I scarce think I ever heard so horrid a sound as that deep, tuneless laugh from the great negro as he stood upon the stained planking, stripped to the waist, and holding aloft the polished skull of the long dead king. He laughed as I have said, and then with a quick jerk he threw back the skull cap and poured the gems into his hand. The crew saw the treasure and made a desperate effort, but though the helmsman pitched forward into the waist, and Bazan was beaten down upon one knee, they were too late.

A moment the stones lay in the negro's huge black palm, a glittering heap of many colours, and then, with another laugh, he sent them spinning over the side. They flashed through the air like little sparks of fire, and vanished for ever into the green curves of the waves, to trouble man no more.

With a cry Gabriel hurled the skull amongst the crew, and, unfastening his heavy sword, fell with fury upon them. Bazan got upon his feet, and for a brief space these two beat back all comers, till not a dozen of the mutineers remained. But it could not last, and Bazan was finally struck down, bleeding and senseless, his steel cap beaten in and crushed.

The negro raised him, heedless of the blows which fell upon him, and, running quickly to the poop hatchway, bundled the wounded man bodily down the ladder, and then turned at bay. Good luck! I can see him yet, covered with blood and filth, mad with the battle fever, as he turned upon the remnant of his foes. With a bound he was upon them, and right and left he struck out, dealing fearful blows. Two

men fell, each cloven to the chin, and then the others closed silently around him. He towered above them, like a stag which the dogs worry, and he seemed to be fighting with his naked hands. I saw him sink and rise again, a bruised and battered mass, and then a strange cry burst from his tongueless mouth, and, as the crew drew back from their bloody work, I saw him lying on the reddened planks, gripping one man by the throat while another lay across his legs.

The fight was over, but of the thirty men who had formed the crew of the *Santa Maria* but ten remained, and half of those seemed in a sorry plight. Four straightway threw themselves down and lay like logs upon the deck, and the others ran to the hatch and disappeared, no doubt in search of further treasure, but the fools had clean forgotten about the men in the tops.

In a moment there came a whistle from away forward, and turning, we saw Simon getting into the shrouds.

'Our time has come, Sir Jaspar,' I said. 'Do you go down on the lee side and I will take the weather, there are plenty of weapons to be had for the taking.' We waited till Simon was up with us, and then very softly we pounced upon the four worthies. Without a word we ran the terrified dons to the hatch and pitched them down, and then Simon sprang to one of the culverins upon the poop.

'Quick, lads, quick,' he cried, and we saw his meaning.

Putting out all our strength, we ran the gun to the hatchway, and pointed it downwards.

'Stay here, Jeremy,' said Simon, who, in a moment, had become our leader, 'and now, Sir Jaspar, follow.'

They ran forwards, staggering and slipping on the wet deck, and clapped the heavy hatch on forward, driving in the blocks which fixed it. Then back they came with a keg of powder and a couple of balls, and we loaded the culverin to the muzzle, and so, when the treasure-seeking dons came out of the cabin, they found their wounded comrades cursing and groaning at the foot of the ladder, and above was the grinning mouth of a cannon threatening to blow them into atoms, and then they remembered, but remembered too late, the men who had been in the tops, but who were now, by the grace of God and the cunning of Simon Grisel, masters of the good ship *Santa Maria*.

CHAPTER XXX

OF OUR SAILING TO THE NORTH

SUCH a volley of oaths and such yells of rage I have never heard as those which came up the hatchway from the unhappy dons. They shrieked and wept like men possessed of evil spirits, and well they might, for they had fought a whole morning, had lost their comrades and killed their captain, all for the pleasure of looking into the mouth of a culverin, and putting themselves at the mercy of two Englishmen and a man of Fife.

As for us, we could scarce believe our good fortune, but though at first sight it seemed a great thing to take possession of a well-found Spanish ship of twelve guns, six of a side, yet, on second thoughts, we began to see that it had its drawbacks. We were somewhere to the westward of the coast of Spain, over a week's sail from friendly waters, and how were three men, only two of whom had any skill in navigating, to fetch a course for an English port, when, besides the chance of dirty weather, they had ten maddened dons to keep in custody? When this thought dawned upon us, we looked at one another with puzzled faces, and then with one accord burst into a great roar of laughter.

'Beshrew me,' said Simon, 'it may prove a case of from frying-pan into fire again, and yet everything has gone as I wished it.'

'Your hand, old comrade,' said I, and we gripped each other till I saw the tears come into Simon's eyes, for I was a trifle stronger in the arms and wrists than the pikeman.

'What is to be done now?' asked Sir Jasper. 'We have battened down the rascals, but the charts are all below and—'

'Make your mind easy,' answered Simon, 'I have a chart of our course pricked out on parchment, and have a very fair idea of where we lie.'

'God bless me,' said the little knight, 'methinks there was some method in your madness.'

Simon smiled, and then roared down the hatchway to the dons that if their noise did not cease within the minute, he would give them good cause for shrieking, and this served to quiet them.

'We are safe so far,' he said, 'for there are stores and water forward, but we shall have enough to do to make Plymouth. You and I, Jeremy, can navigate after a fashion, and Sir Jaspar must needs act as guard and cook. What say you?'

'With all my heart,' answered that worthy; 'this is a ploy to my liking. But first, I shall set these dead fellows afloat; they will need no cooking for the fishes.'

While I stood by the culverin Simon took the tiller, and Sir Jaspar, finding few wounded amongst the fallen, set to work, and I marvelled to see what strength the little knight had—for though most of the dons were small men, yet Gabriel, though cut, hacked and stabbed in fifty places, was no light weight, and Captain Miguel made a bulky carcase. At last, however, he finished his gruesome task, though not before his face was as red as the planking, and the best part of his breath gone.

'Who would have thought,' he panted, 'that I should have thrown the angel overboard, to say naught of our spitting friend. Truly, Jeremy, the times are changed.'

'An we do not have a care they may change again,' I answered.

'What, croaking once more? But look you, there is no doubt you are at the root of all this, as I have said before—a veritable Jonah—and we shall have no peace till I pitch you over the side, like these unlucky wights,' and he pointed astern.

'You had best try it,' I said grimly, and then started, for a voice, which I recognised as Bazan's, came up the hatchway.

'Good lack!' I shouted to Simon, 'old wrinkled phiz is still in the flesh.'

'Then he had best keep quiet an he would stay there. What does he want?'

'He asks our terms.'

'Tell him, no noise or a riddled skin; we have other matters to think about.'

My answer made the dons curse, but finally they left the foot of the ladder and shut themselves into the cabin; nor did we see more of them the rest of that day.

'When thieves fall out, honest men get their due,' quoth Sir Jaspar; 'but Bazan seems friendly with those rascals, and he has a long head.'

'Talking of heads,' said I, 'where is the skull?'

'It lies in the waist; but the gems are gone, one and all,' answered Sir Jaspar, ruefully.

'It matters not a whit, we have the great stones and the *Santa Maria*; in good sooth, we are far from beggars, and, if we come through this safely, I shall keep the skull "in memoriam," as the Latin has it.'

'There spake the dominie,' laughed Sir Jaspar; 'but had we not better get some weight upon the hatch forward, the dons may try it from the under deck, and it is not over strong.'

'Good,' I answered. 'An you keep guard I will see to it; ' which I did straightway, and also lowered a bucket over the side, and cleaned the decks a little, for the blood lay in great dark splashes, or trickled slowly from poop to waist.

We were under weigh again, and Simon shouted to us that we were bound for the Channel, and so, there being no need to shorten sail, I went into the forecastle, which opened on to the waist, and carried some food aft to Sir Jaspar and Simon.

Then we formed our plan for carrying the barque to England. Simon and I were to steer by turns, and trim the sails, while Sir Jaspar cooked and kept guard, and, though we trusted for the best, it was very clear that we should have little sleep and much worry ere we made Plymouth Sound.

Now, I am not minded to set down all that happened on our voyage to the north, for it was a weary time of waiting and watching, with but little of interest to one who has never been aboard the *Santa Maria*.

We had the dons up one by one, took their arms from them, and bound them firmly—all save Bazan, who was sore

wounded, and whom we kept on deck. Moreover, to my great joy, I found one of the rascals with my old blade, which, as you may perchance remember, I had given to Simon, and so pleased was I at this that I fear I dealt over-gently with the owner, for I took good care to kick each of the dons down the ladder; but he went free, as I was too much taken up with the examining of my good sword to pay any heed to him.

Each day we passed food down to the Spaniards and took care, by Simon's advice, to keep them on short rations, for, as he said,—

‘Strength, when fasting,
Is never lasting.’

And all my life I have found this a true maxim and a good one.

We deemed it best to risk a gale and not to shorten sail, which no doubt savoured of folly, but fortune favoured us, and day after day a steady breeze blew from the southward, and the clumsy barque forged onwards, covering mile after mile of gently-ruffled sea. Bazan's wounds healed quickly, and, being a philosopher, he took matters in good part, though I know full well that, had we relaxed our vigilance in the very least, he would have done his best to win back the *Santa Maria*. As it was, whenever he was fit to move about, we bound him also, and sent him below, much to his disgust, but we could afford to run no risks, and turned deaf ears to his entreaties and promises.

Albeit matters went smoothly I would not have passed through another such week for gold untold, as what between fear of the dons and fear of the weather breaking, loss of sleep and doubt as to whether we were steering rightly or no, I was well-nigh in a fever ere we made the Land's End, and Sir Jaspar and Simon were little better.

Little by little, and at odd times, I heard Simon's story, and had good reason to marvel at my comrade's shrewdness, and no less at his dogged courage, though it showed clearly enough how he had come through his manifold perils in times past.

After leaving us in the valley to the eastward of Port d'Espagne, he had made his way by the base of the hills to the southward, and had entered the town as if coming from

San Josef or San Fernando. He very soon found that the dons had made prisoners of the English mariners who had been taken by surprise and treachery, and imprisoned in a long, low building of wood called the guard-house, situate near the centre of the town. They had been offered their liberty if they would give information as to their leaders, but this the trusty fellows would not do, and so had been kept under lock and key.

Simon resolved to get speech with them, but found it no easy matter, for they were closely guarded by the dons who, to tell the truth, were in considerable fear of their captives, for in these days an Englishman esteemed himself worth three yellow-skins at the least, and the Spaniards had but little doubt that he was right. The old soldier, however, was not long in finding a way of letting the *Francis'* men know that help was near. He contrived to make most of the guards drunken, and then, having enticed them into a small house close at hand, he had, as if by mishap, set fire to the place, and when there was much to-do about the saving of the house and the drunken dons, he had found a small hole in the guard-house and spoken with the imprisoned crew. They had hurriedly formed a plan of escape, and agreed that Simon was to be at the hole the next night, but, unhappily for them, he fell in with Jonas Squabbles, who, beyond a doubt, was at the bottom of all the mischief. The rascal was clearly in two minds as to whether or no this long squinting don was the pikeman who had caught him eaves-dropping, for Simon had been wounded on the face by one of the drunken guards.

Simon saw, however, that his suspicions were roused, and deemed it wise to retreat in time, for it was evident that all chance of rescuing the crew was over for the present.

Therefore he left the town, but was promptly met by the men of the *Santa Maria*, though not before, seeing that he could not escape them, he had hit upon a plan for deceiving them, and placing himself and his two comrades out of reach of Squabbles and his wiles. He set to work and tore his clothes, bedaubed himself with mud, slavered and mumbled, and all but scared the first two of the men he met out of their wits. He would not answer their questions, but kept babbling on about two Englishmen and their treasure,

till Bazan saw that there was something in what he said, and so in the long run we were captured, as Simon had designed, though he had not bargained for the shot which whistled past my head.

The rest you already know, how Squabbles came upon the scene a trifle late for his purpose, and how Bazan, thinking Simon was a Spaniard, put him with his mongrel crew. There the old pikeman had told more lies than he cared to remember, and bit by bit had roused the crew against Bazan and Miguel. He had talked with them in a strange mixture of sense and folly, and told them of the great treasure which he said Bazan and Miguel were keeping to themselves. For a time they would not believe him, but at last, being driven to it, he had shown them the great ruby eye, taking care, shortly thereafter, to pitch it overboard in their sight, apparently in a fit of madness, otherwise he would have had a knife between his ribs ere he was many hours older.

Moreover, he had crept every now and then into the stern cabin and stolen a copy of the chart, and so cleverly had he timed matters, that the rising had taken place within a day's sailing from the coast of Spain. He had hit upon the rhyme as the best way of cheating the negro, who, he told me, had been bound by some curious tie to Bazan, which had made him love that strange man as a dog loves his master, and in the end give his life for him.

Gabriel, as we had feared, had known something of English, but Simon had thought, and rightly too, that he would pay little notice to a madman's song, and so had tricked him. All this, and much more beside, which there is no time to set down, did the old pikeman tell me, and, despite the strain and discomfort he had passed through, I could see that it had been a business after his own heart, and that the joy of having made fools of the hated yellow-skins was more like to put him off his balance than all the dangers and risks he had undergone. Indeed, he chuckled and laughed every time he told us part of the tale, and no wonder, for some of the nonsense he had made the crew believe was sufficient to have split the sides of the gravest saint in the calendar.

As for Sir Jaspar, he was never tired of hearing the tale, and vowed that he would tell Queen Bess every whit, for he

said that, next to a comely youth like himself, Her Majesty took pleasure in the hearing of plots, and especially of plots against the dons, though, to be sure, only if they ended the proper way, or gave promise of so ending.

By a merciful Providence we had a week and more of as fine weather as the veriest grumbler could wish to see, and had scarce to alter a sail or shift the helm. The Spaniards were too cowed by their misfortune and the sight of the culverin to do aught more than curse at us, and this we let them do freely till they tired of it. As soon as we sighted the Land's End, as the westernmost point of England is aptly named, we brought Bazan up to see it, as a hint that he had no more chance of escape. He took matters very coolly and shrugged his lean shoulders as best he could, his hands being bound behind his back.

'I confess to you,' he said, 'that I am beaten, and yet not altogether like a fool. I had my doubts as to whether the madman was a schemer or no, and thinking he might be an Englishman, for, pardon me, we do not rear such ugly fellows in Spain, I let you two have the freedom of the deck and set Gabriel to watch the game. Poor Gabriel!'

'How came you to have a negro as servant?' asked Sir Jaspar, who had a love of horrors and would have had me wager with him as to how Gabriel had lost his tongue.

'Well,' answered Bazan, 'it is a long tale, but to be brief, I saved him from some black devils who had, by way of sport, cut out his tongue and were slowly torturing him to death, and, carrambo! 'twas the best day's work I ever did, for he served me well, but now he is gone, curse you!'

'Softly, softly,' said Simon, 'your own crew made an end of him.'

'Thanks be to you,' muttered the Spaniard, who, after the sudden flash of rage, had calmed down again. 'You have played your game well, but I shall be even with you yet, though I would to the Virgin I had cut your throat when first I saw you.'

'Grammercy for your clemency,' said Sir Jaspar.

Bazan paid no head. 'Remember,' he sneered, 'that in England you have a proverb as to cup and lip, which, if it proves true once, may do so again,' and with an ugly smile the Spaniard walked to the hatchway and went below.

'A most ungrateful fellow,' said Sir Jaspar. 'When one thinks of all we have suffered from the dons it seems a pity he should have the trouble of living, but I trust his words mean nothing.'

'I do not know,' said Simon, uneasily. 'The sky line is not as it should be, and there are heavy cloud-banks to the south'ard.'

'Dost think there is a gale brewing?' I asked.

'It may be, lad, but I think in any case you had best aloft and take in sail. 'Tis well to be prepared, even though we have not far to go.'

For the next hour I was busy at work, and, being unused to it, found it a hard matter to gather in and tuck the sails beneath the rope loops, but I did my best, and within an hour and-a-half the *Santa Maria* was under bare poles, save for some head-sail and the maintop-sail. I reached the deck, hot and tired, and found Sir Jaspar fastening whatever was loose and making all snug, while Simon was passing food and water down to the prisoners, for, as he said, 'We cannot tell when we shall have time to feed them again, and it is better to be in readiness.'

'Then you fear a storm?' I asked.

'I fear 'tis going to blow hard, Jeremy; look at these heavy clouds, and dost see that strip of silver white close upon the sea?'

I nodded.

'That is not there for nothing, lad, and though the wind has dropped a nasty swell has risen, while there is a strange oiliness upon the sea that I do not like; though I lay no claim to sea-lore, yet I have seen enough to know that this stillness is not to be trifled with.'

'Twould be hard to come to shipwreck when we have got thus far,' said I.

'Who talks of shipwreck?' said Sir Jaspar, who joined us for a moment. 'What, old croaker, are you at it again? Commend me to a Scot for a spirit damper—but what is that?'

A deep, rumbling sound, like the distant firing of heavy guns, reached us, and looking astern, we saw that the line of light in the horizon had turned a dull, yellow colour, while it had grown strangely dark.

'Thunder!' said Simon. 'See, there is a flash!' A streak of fire darted from one of the heavy cloud-banks and zig-zagged downwards to the sea, and again came the ominous rumbling, while a few great raindrops pattered loudly on the deck. Gradually it grew darker, till the faint coast line to larboard of us seemed to blend with the gloomy sky, and the sun gave up the struggle with the storm clouds, and vanished behind them, leaving naught but a faint, glittering line of white upon the oily swell. The rain had ceased, and the silence was broken only by the creak of some timber or the rattle of a block, and we fell to talking in whispers and watching the sky astern of us.

'It brings to my mind that day when the *Water Sprite* parted company with the fleet,' said I.

'Yes, 'tis like it,' said Sir Jaspar. 'How strange it is that we three are here together after all that has passed. Truly, I can scarce believe there ever were such things as the "Iron Lady," and the "Great Snake."' "

'You have but to go forward there and the skull will show you these were no dreams, but here comes the rain!'

The great drops came sputtering and splashing on the planks, and with them came the first breath of wind, hot and faint, and then little puffs which caused the barque to plunge forward heavily and bury her snout in the smooth swells, while a ripple of circles, fringed by two rows of frothy bubbles, streamed away from under her counter. For perchance a half-hour it continued in this fashion, and then the tops of the swells began to show a crest of white, and flecks of foam were blown from them by the wind gusts, which made a mournful sound as they whistled through the rigging and drove the heavy raindrops in showers before them. Darker and yet darker it became, and the air seemed filled with a gloomy yellowness, a kind of choking mist which wrapped us round and hid the surface of the sea from us. Glancing over the high side of the barque, one looked down into a vague abyss, from which every now and then a froth-clad surge arose, only to sink back again with a gurgle, as if baffled in its attempt to board and sweep the decks.

'Good lack!' said I, 'this is the most eerie day I have seen since the *Hibou* and De Cusac came ashore.'

‘God grant we do not go ashore,’ said Sir Jaspar; ‘the very air feels clammy and seems to stifle one.’

Again there came a low muttering of thunder, followed by a furious blast, and a great wave burst upon us and ran hissing past, the barque speeding forward upon its crest and then sliding back slowly into the hollow, with the water which had come aboard streaming from her. By this time we had clapped on the poop hatch, and could do nothing more than take position. Simon and I stood by the tiller, and Sir Jaspar went forward to keep a look-out, for in these narrow seas one may fall in with ships, or floating wreckage. It was night-fall, however, before the gale burst upon us in all its fury, and we drove up Channel, the stout barque quivering in every plank, as the heavy waves struck her astern and hurtled under her with a seething roar. The night was dark as pitch, save for the lightning streaks, and we rushed onwards, madly, blindly, Simon and I straining every muscle to keep her before the wind, and listening for Sir Jaspar’s warning hail. It seemed as if the day would never break, and when it did it brought us no comfort, for though the wind abated a trifle, the great seas threatened to poop us, and in the end I had to set some sail upon the foremast, and was, in consequence, well-nigh blown out of the rigging, but somehow I let the topsail loose and clambered down.

On we sped, a dismal, soaking craft, the spume and salt spray flying over us in clouds, and chilling us to the bone, on and on till night fell again, the dull grey light vanished, and Sir Jaspar crept aft soaked and shivering, having seen nothing of ships or land.

We could now and again catch the cries and prayers of the dons cooped up below, who never knew what a moment would bring forth, though for that matter neither did we; but still, it is something to be on deck and have your hands free in time of tempest.

The second night passed somehow, and the back of the storm was broken, but it landed us in a dangerous place, for in our wild flight we had swept through the Straits of Dover, and now away to the eastward could see the race of waters on the dreaded sands of Godwin, where many a ship’s company, since that of the great earl, have yielded up their

spirits. Indeed, had day not dawned we might have rushed full upon these fatal shallows and been ground to pieces, but by the mercy of God we hauled to the northward, and running close by the Kentish cliffs came in due time to the mouth of the river Thames, and finding the tide favourable, we ran up stream past low-lying ground and many small craft, and we thanked God for bringing us in shore and for the knowledge Simon Grisel had of the river channel.

As soon as we got into still water, Sir Jaspar made his toilet, and after a hearty meal nothing would please him but to hoist the flag of England over that of Spain, whereby he came to grief, slipping from the shrouds and twisting his ankle joint, so that it became swollen and painful.

Now, when I saw this bravery at the main I went into the forecastle, and finding a great blue banner without device I crossed it with white stripes from corner to corner and set it astern, for I was not born north of the Tweed for nothing, and deemed it unfitting in a Scot to leave the flag of Saint George to flaunt over the *Santa Maria* unless the banner of Saint Andrew should bear it company. Sir Jaspar would have torn it down, but Simon smiled and nodded.

'You are right, lad,' he said, 'tis a brave cross and floats with honour. God grant these two may come together some day, and then woe betide their foes!'

'Amen to that,' said I, 'though there is but small chance of it, I fear.'

And so in glorious fashion we sped up the river with the first of the tide, and at Simon's order I freed the great anchor at the bows, and seeing all was free, let it go overboard with a sullen plunge into the clear water, and a merry sound the huge cable made as it sped through the hawse hole and fixed us to English ground.

CHAPTER XXXI

OF THE STROKE WITH THE SWORD AND THE FACE IN THE CROWD

WE had come to an anchorage off the southern shore, opposite a little village called Greenwich, with which Simon was well acquainted, and we soon saw that our arrival had caused no little stir ashore. We could see people running down to the water's edge, and a great crowd gather in front of a long building, which Simon told me was one of the Queen's palaces, and so by way of salute we fired a cannon and dipped our flags.

Having furled sail, Simon and I lowered the small boat which had escaped damage in the storm, and as Sir Jaspar could not go ashore by reason of his foot, and as Simon would not for some reason of his own, it fell upon me to carry the news of our capture to the recorder of shipping, for I found that all things had to be performed 'decently and in order,' as the Scripture hath it. Sir Jaspar was mightily vexed at having to stay aboard, for he dearly loved display and to be the bearer of tidings, but I told him it served him right for threatening to tear down my flag, and the little knight had to make the best of matters. Simon gave me directions as to what I should do and where to go, and Sir Jaspar, ere I pushed off, handed me a little bag of money which he had found in the forecastle.

'For the love of God, Jeremy,' said he, 'get me, if you can, a casket of scented pomadum, for these brutes of dons use their own spittle and naught beside, and I have none of my own making left.'

I laughed and promised to fetch him what he wanted, and then settling to the oars I pulled for a place where a broad flight of steps led downwards to the water's edge. As

I neared it I saw to my surprise a great black barge lying alongside the steps, a gorgeous craft filled with cushions and cloth of silk, and glittering with gilding and carved devices, and near it were two others, smaller and less adorned. A canopy of purple cloth with heavy fringes shaded its stern sheets, and there were only two men in charge, the one in the bow, a big, surly-faced fellow, who, with a heavy oar, was keeping the barge from striking against the lowest steps. As I pulled up to land and made fast he turned angrily upon me.

'Out of the way, fellow,' he shouted.

'Out of the way yourself,' I cried.

He aimed a blow at me with his oar, but I caught it, and pushing it backwards I struck him on the chest with it and knocked him head over heels into the river. He rose from the water sputtering and swearing, but I paid no attention either to him or to the others, and fastening the boat, stepped out upon the stairs. As I did so, however, and as the hapless wherryman clambered out of the water, dripping and cursing, there came a blare of trumpets, and, to my horror, the head of a gay procession appeared at the top of the stairs. Ere I had time to get out of the way it was upon me as I stood in its path with stained and torn clothes and unkempt hair.

'Way, way for the Queen!' came the cry, and another trumpet blare. Two heralds came first, and I could see a long train of people behind them, but so taken by surprise was I, that I stood on the stairs like a graven image, till a voice said sharply, 'What is this, sirrah? Is this the fashion in which you treat my liege servants?'

I looked up, and in a moment knew that I was in the presence of Elizabeth. Happily I had enough sense left to uncover and bow low, and then I stared long and steadfastly at her, for I had never seen a queen, and knew that I had done nothing of which to be ashamed.

She was a tall woman, very stately and handsome withal, but there was no sign of mercy in her eyes, though they had in them a proud and haughty look that suited her long and stern face, and was what one looked for in the woman who was England's queen. Her forehead was lofty, her nose straight and finely moulded, her mouth thin-lipped, and her

chin small and pointed. She was very clearly displeased and a flush of colour was upon either cheek as she stood and tapped with her foot upon the stair. I cannot tell how she was dressed, but I call to mind the great fan-like collar which circled her neck and the glitter of a jewelled hasp which clasped her cloak in front.

I stared at her in wonder till she frowned and repeated her question even more sharply than before.

'Pray, your Majesty,' said I, for I had some idea from Sir Jaspar's talk of what was deemed fitting speech, 'this is a free country, and yonder fellows disputed my landing.'

'And so you took the law into your own hands!'

Not knowing what to say I stood silent.

'Where are you from, sirrah?'

'I am last from the barque there in the river, I answered, turning and pointing to the *Santa Maria*.

'What,' she cried, 'the ship with the English flag above the Spanish?'

'Even so, your Majesty.'

'But what banner is that at the stern?'

'Tis the cross of Saint Andrew, please your Majesty.'

'What riddle is this, sir?' she said. 'Explain this folly. Nay,' she added, as a courtier said something to her in a low voice, 'I shall hear him here and now.'

As best I could I stammered out our story, beginning with our capture in Trinidad and leaving off with the storm, but I took care not to mention Sir Jaspar by name, lest I might do him an injury, for he had told me that he was none too sure of his reception.

'What,' cried the Queen, when I had made an end, 'dost mean to say that you with two others took this great ship of Spain and sailed her hither?'

'Even so,' I answered, and plucked up heart.

'By my troth,' she said, 'this is a tale worth hearing. What say you, gentlemen?'

A murmur of assent ran through the crowd of folk who were pressing forward to have a look at me.

'Your name, sir?' asked the Queen.

'Jeremy Clephane,' I answered.

'By no means,' she said.

I looked at her in surprise.

'Your Majesty is mistaken,' I made bold to say.

'By no means,' she said again, and smiled a little.

I stared at her, wondering what she meant, while the folk around laughed at my bewildered look.

'Kneel, sir.'

I did as I was bid, for I was past thinking, and she took a sword from a courtier and smote me sharply across the shoulders with it.

'Rise, Sir Jeremy Clephane,' she said in a loud voice so that all might hear.

I rose to my feet and could scarce help believing that this was all a dream which would pass away, and I would presently find that I had been standing sound asleep, grasping the tiller of the *Santa Maria*. But no! for the same voice said,—

'You will attend me at Court on the morrow, Sir Jeremy, for I would hear more of this tale, and bring your comrades also. But now suffer me to pass. Remember, howbeit, if you have lied to me, you lose head and title at one and the same time.'

'But, Your Majesty,' I stammered, struck by a sudden thought.

'Well, sir,' she asked, 'what is it? Does knighthood not suffice you?'

'Tis an honour I never dreamed of,' I answered firmly, 'but please, Your Majesty, I am a Scotchman.'

At this there was a roar of laughter from all around.

'Ah,' said the Queen, 'is that all? Dost mean to say a Scot cannot lie? or dost think an English knighthood is not good enough? Well, well, we shall ask our nephew of Scotland to ratify our doings, you—how call they obstinate in Scotland?'

A tall man clad in black, with silver hair and a shrewd, keen face, said quickly,—

'Dour is the word, Your Majesty.'

'That is it, you dour Scotchman, but fail not to attend our Court, or you shall find how we punish those who maltreat our loyal bargemen.'

I bowed low, at which the folk tittered again, and then I withdrew to one side, while, as the long train passed, the people turned and gazed at me in wonder.

I stood and watched them, marvelling at their gay attire and haughty bearing, and then my heart stood still for a moment, while I felt my head whirl and I wondered vaguely if I were in my senses, for there before me, passing by me, was Marjorie Bethune, a trifle older looking, more womanly, perchance, but for all that the same little maid who had mocked and befooled me at the pool in the woods. I stared at her, speechless with surprise, yet, strange to say, instead of hating her and cursing her for a jade as I had oft thought I would do, I stood and longed for her to turn, longed for another glance from her sweet eyes, and to catch a glimpse of her sunny smile and dimpled chin. She passed by me, however, without a look towards where I stood, talking briskly to a tall man with bowed shoulders who walked by her side, and I felt that I loathed this fellow ; and then as a thought came into my head I plucked the sleeve of a man who stood near me, and pointing to Marjorie, I asked him in a low, eager voice who that was.

‘Eh, where,’ he said, ‘yonder lady. She is Madame de Sholtz, the new Court beauty. You have an eye for good looks, like myself, sir, like myself.’

‘What,’ I stammered, ‘madame did you say?’

‘God bless me, yes, the wife of De Sholtz, that fellow from the Netherlands. You must have heard of him but, why, you are the new knight, the shortest in the kingdom, they say. Come, sir, come, we must drink a bumper together,’ and he took hold of me and began to drag me up the steps.

I shook him off angrily, to his great disgust, and stood like a stricken thing upon the stairs, paying no heed to the noisy throng who followed the royal train. I had gained a knighthood and the knowledge that Maid Marjorie was lost to me, all in the space of a few minutes.

‘*Mon Dieu !*’ as De Cusac would have said, ‘was ever man so much the sport of fortune’s freaks?’

Marjorie the wife of another ! Strange to say, despite the manner of our parting, I had never thought such a thing would come to pass. I had ever dreamed of the time when I should, as Sir Jaspar put it, lay siege to her again, and now she had been captured, and I was undone. I stood still in a kind of dull hopelessness, till I was roused by a sharp blow on the shoulder, and a voice saying,—

‘Now, little man, give place, give place.’

I turned and found myself beset by a bevy of youths—simpering fools, dressed in gaudy colours, and scented and bedecked with ribands and other finery. The one who had spoken to me seemed to be their leader, and he threw up his head with an air of great disdain, and waved me aside as if he had been a great lord and I a beggar. He was a young man with a fair drooping moustachios, pink cheeks and a tuft of hair upon his under lip, and it was easy to tell that his life of late had not been such as makes a youth a man.

‘Dost hear me, insolent?’ he said, as I paid no heed to him, there being plenty of room for him to pass.

I was so sad at heart, so perturbed by all that had happened since I left the barque, that I scarce took in his meaning, and thinking me a chicken heart, no doubt, and wishing to seem bold before his fellows, he struck me across the face with a small switch he carried in his hand.

Now I can stand much and have ever thought lightly of a bruise, but a blow on the face is the one thing which has always served to rouse me quickly, and God knows I needed but little rousing at that time. In a moment I darted at the fool, clutched his tiny tuft of beard between thumb and forefinger, and when I had done with him there was nought left but a crimson stain and a trickling line of red, which gathered in drops upon his chin.

With a yell of rage and pain he sprang at me with clenched fists, but I stepped quietly back a pace, and very slowly I rolled up my sleeve from wrist to elbow, keeping my eyes fixed upon the young man’s face.

His glance lit upon my forearm, and then I smiled grimly, knowing that the courage had oozed out of him, and I said nothing, but left him and his friends to think upon the lesson I had taught them, and took my way to the house of the recorder of shipping, feeling a trifle soothed by this small incident. When I had settled matters with this worthy man, and left him not a little pleased and astonished, I returned to the *Santa Maria*, and was soundly rated by Sir Jaspas, for I had forgotten to fetch his pom-adum, and no wonder, considering all that had happened.

‘Of all careless knaves, Jeremy,’ said he, ‘you are the worst.’

'Sir Jeremy, an it please you,' I answered, wishing to astonish him.

'What?' he shouted.

Thereupon I told him of my meeting with the Queen, and what had befallen me.

'By my head,' said the little knight, 'to think that I have missed this chance. We saw that something was taking place on shore, and noted the barges row up stream, but that you should have met the Queen, it passes all. She knighted you also upon the spot. God bless me! I never heard the like, though, as I have oft told you, she loves an adventure of this sort. Sir Jeremy! well, well, 'tis a fitting end to all our strange escapades, and yet, despite it all, you look as glum as our friends the dons. What is the matter?'

When I had told them of Maid Majorie, and how she was lost to me, they marvelled still more and showed their sympathy with me by talking of everything which might serve to keep me from brooding over this trouble, but I had little heart for listening to Sir Jaspar's jests and Simon's plans, and I slipped away by myself to think sorrowfully over what might have been, and mourn at my ill luck. As I sat in a corner, leaning my head upon my hands, I felt a touch upon the shoulders, and, looking up, saw Simon's kindly face.

'Jeremy, lad,' said he, 'I know that I can say little by way of comfort, but look you, there are other things than women to live and fight for. You have gained back your title and are no longer a mere wanderer, but a knight of Scotland; and, lad, you have still a friend left, so cheer up, old comrade!'

'God bless you, Simon,' I answered, 'you are a true friend, and in time I shall be myself again, but now leave me for awhile. I would look the matter in the face and be done with it.'

For an hour I sat and thought it over, and Simon's kind words did much to comfort me, and, above all, the thought that there was once more a knight of the shire of Fife bearing the name of Clephane, for though my good father had cared nothing for such things, yet I, ever since I could reason, had sought to win my spurs and be Sir Jeremy, as my grandfather had been Sir Roger, though I

had told no one of this save one, and that one not Simon Grisel, though perchance he had guessed it.

Fortunately I had little time to think about my own affairs, for a party of foot soldiers boarded us and the dons were taken ashore. I never saw men so downcast as these Spaniards, and if looks could have killed they would have slain us on the spot. I took good care to hide away the skull, and we made an agreement to share alike, as Simon had lost his portion of the spoil, and then a crew having been sent us, we joined with them in getting up sail and anchor, and with the first turn of the tide ran up the river as far as London town.

It was dark by the time we came to an anchorage again, and I gazed over the side wondering at the multitudes of lights on shore, and watching the swift current as it sped past us. A distant hum as of many voices reached me, and now and then the faint clanging of a bell, and I bade fair to grow gloomy once more, till Simon called me aft to the cabin, and there we took council with Sir Jaspar. The little knight had a plan ready for us. He knew of lodgings within a reasonable distance of the palace where we could put up for a time at least, and make ready for our audience with the Queen, and he was in high spirits at the thought of revisiting his old haunts with somewhat of fame and distinction added to his name.

'I must act with caution, though,' he said, 'and so, as my foot, thanks to Simon's skill and cold water, has ceased to pain me, I will ashore this very night and find from my old friend, Will Netherby, who has charge of my affairs, how matters stand; and, by the way, Jeremy, what of the Papish plot? You may be best in hiding also.'

'Good luck! I had forgotten all about it,' I answered. 'I will go with you if I may. Wilt come, Simon?'

'Nay, lad, now that we are safe home I shall early to bed. I have slept but little since those nights in Trinidad.'

Sir Jaspar and I were rowed to a small jetty on the river's bank and there we landed, and wrapping cloaks about us, set off up a narrow street pervaded by a very foul odour.

'By my head,' said the little knight, 'it stinks as it did of yore. Some of us had a merry fight with the watch in this very street. Ah me! 'tis five years since then. Have a care,

Jeremy, the road is none of the best, and a trip might cost you dear.'

On we went through a maze of streets, till finally Sir Jaspar stopped at the door of a small house and gave three double raps upon it. After a time it was opened by a man with a lantern, who, when he saw the little knight, gave a low cry of astonishment, and beckoned us to follow him. We entered, and he led us to a room where a cheerful fire of logs was burning on the hearth and the table littered with the remnants of a wine supper.

Seen by the candle light our host was a fat and jovial-looking fellow, with a bald head and little twinkling eyes, which seemed as if they ever looked on the merry side of life.

'Bless me,' he said with an oath, 'where hast dropped from? When the fleet came back without you, I deemed you gone for ever and the money mine.'

'And so there is none left, I opine,' said Sir Jaspar

'Fie! fie!' cried the other, 'it is as when you left, for I knew you had a knack of coming through scrapes, and that I might look for little mercy if you turned up and found I had made free with it. But who is this with you?'

'This,' said Sir Jaspar, 'is one who rose this morning a gentleman of fortune, but is now Sir Jeremy Clephane, knight of Scotland.'

'God bless me,' said Netherby, 'that is a mouthful, and all in one day. But I see you have something to tell me, so wait till I but fill your glasses and then I am at your service.'

Our worthy host bustled about for a time, and then settled down by the fireside to hear Sir Jaspar's tale, and what with his face of astonishment and Sir Jaspar's jests and witticisms, I was sore in the sides long before the little knight had made an end.

'By all that is holy,' said Netherby, 'was there ever the like. The Queen will go mad over this tale. Truly, those that go down to the deep see great wonders. What with virgins and sharks, snakes and treasure, my poor head feels like to burst. Either you have seen more than most men, Love-day or you are even a greater liar than I thought.'

'A thousand thanks, as the dons say,' answered Sir Jaspar. 'But now, Will, tell me, am I safe?'

'That you are. Beverly went to Ireland and died there

four months ago, and on my honour, they have been hard put to it for a fool at the court since you left. Ha ! Ha ! there is a tribute to your memory.'

'You are as bad as ever, Will ; but now, tell me, hast heard aught of a Papish plot ?'

'Hist !' whispered Netherby, half springing from his chair, 'for God's sake have a care. What do you know of it ?'

'Little enough,' answered Sir Jaspar, 'but my friend Sir Jeremy here had rather overmuch to do with it for his taste some time ago.'

Then he had best keep quiet an he values his neck, for between you and me, all is discovered, and Walsingham is but waiting to draw the net thoroughly and well ; but, sir,' he added, 'what had you to do with it ?'

When I had told him of De Cusac and my adventures in Edinburgh, he whistled softly to himself.

'So, so, then this was the beginning o't. However, the present is a fresh plot, I warrant, but if you swear to say nothing of it, I will tell you all.'

We gave our promises, and presently he told us of what has long since been matter of history, to wit, the plot of Anthony Babington and a priest to set Mary free and to murder Elizabeth. We listened with breathless interest, scarce noting how the time sped past.

'Whew !' said Sir Jaspar, 'things are in a ticklish state. It means Mary's head, I fear, if, as you say, she is privy to it.'

'There can be little doubt she will suffer,' said Netherby 'though the Queen is in two minds as to what to do, at least, so it seems to me ; but,' he added, looking at me doubtfully, 'you are a Scot, perchance I should have said nothing of it.'

'I have given my promise,' I answered ; 'but in any case you need have no fear. I am a Protestant, and, as I have told you, once before I resolved to place my country's good first, nor has my mind altered, though, mark you, I have no wish to see Queen Mary die.'

'Well, well, perchance she may escape the block, though I doubt it, but you are safe enough. I remember there was some stir at the time, but everything was kept quiet, and no doubt the first plot has been forgotten.'

'I am glad of it,' I answered, 'for I have had enough excitement to last me for many years to come.'

‘So I should think,’ laughed Netherby, as he bade us farewell, ‘but see that you do not shout till you are clear of the wood.’

‘I am not likely to,’ I called back, and then Sir Jaspar and I returned as quickly as might be to the river, each too wrapped in his own thoughts to pay much attention to the other.

The two men whom we had left with the boat grumbled a little at the time we had kept them waiting, but Sir Jaspar quieted them with a promise of good pay for their trouble, and then one of them handed me a small note, which, he said, had been given him by a boy who had wished to be rowed to the Spanish barque in the river, as he had a message to Sir Jeremy Clephane.

They had told him where I was, and after hesitating a little he had finally left the note with them.

Wondering much from whom it came, I waited impatiently till we got alongside, and then, after boarding by aid of the rope ladder, I straightway descended to the stern cabin, and spread the writing out before me on the table.

CHAPTER XXXII

OF WHAT I SAW IN THE WELL A SECOND TIME

THE moment I looked at it I started, for I knew who had written the little verse I now read, and considering all I had learned, it seemed strange that it had ever been penned, or, at least, sent to me, for it ran as follows :—

'At six of the clock you will find it *pax*
To be at the street of Saint Mary Axe,
There a good woman the way will show,
So have no fear, and with her go.
But if again you are in error,
This shall be your last endeavour.'

'*Mon Dieu !*' I muttered, for the thought of Maid Marjorie brought to my mind De Cusac and his sayings, 'what can this mean?'

At, that moment Sir Jaspar entered the cabin, limping a little, but whistling cheerily.

'Ah, Sir Jeremy,' he cried, 'what dost think of my friend Will? I tell you he knows more of the trouble of a kingdom than most men, for he is in Walsingham's confidence and has played the spy more than once, and what is more, he has lifted a load of care from off my shoulders.'

'Truly,' said I, 'there has been little sign of the load all these long months we have been together; but what think you of this?' and I handed him the message. 'Tis from Maid Marjorie I may tell you. I know her writing well, and she must have seen me on the steps.'

Sir Jaspar read it with a troubled face, and then shook his head. 'From what you have told me, I would not have thought it of her,' he said slowly. 'Take my advice, Jeremy, and have naught to do with Madame de Sholtz, I have seen too much evil arise from having dealings with other folk's wives and Simon will tell you the same.' But strange

to say, when Simon heard of it the next morning he was not of Sir Jaspar's opinion.

'There is no harm done in seeing what this means,' he said, 'and I think, Jeremy, you are not fool enough to let mischief come of it. At the same time, though there may be some mistake, do not hope overmuch for any good fortune, if that is what *pax* means.'

'Not I,' I answered moodily, 'but it is seven by the clock, we had best ashore,' yet all the time I was thinking if there was a deeper meaning to the word *pax*, for Marjorie and I had been wont to quarrel over its declension in the days which were gone.

The three of us bundled into the small boat, taking the skull with us hidden in a cloak, while Sir Jaspar and I had the great gems still concealed in our clothes, and each of us had taken good care to carry away a heavy bag of ducats from what had been Bazan's private store. As we neared the jetty we saw that, for some reason or other, a crowd was gathered upon it, and as we ran alongside, to our surprise there was a mighty cheer and the folk pressed forward to look at us, and we heard them speaking in whispers one to the other, and pointing to the *Santa Maria*.

'Beshrew me,' said Simon, 'but these good folk seem to have got hold of our story. We shall have trouble.'

And trouble we did have after a fashion, for the whole crowd followed us every step of the way, cheering and shouting till, by the time we reached Sir Jaspar's lodgings, which, as luck would have it, were empty, there were fully a hundred people gathered about us, and I can still remember the different manner in which we took this brave reception. Simon would not look to right or left, but strode along with bowed head as if he had been guilty of some crime, and I could tell that he was praying to get under cover. Sir Jaspar, on the other hand, was in his glory. He walked along bowing from side to side, waving his hands, and as well pleased with himself as if single-handed he had captured the whole fleet of His Majesty of Spain.

As for me, I was thinking too much of my own affairs to pay much heed to all the clamour of the crowd, and yet I confess that I was not displeased at the sight, for it showed me that these Englishmen had a love of country and a

hatred of the dons, and though I am a Scotchman, yet I was at one with them in having a loathing of the yellow-skins.

Nothing would please Sir Jaspar but that he should make a speech to the crowd, which he straightway did from the window of our room, much to their delight and his own satisfaction, and it was fully an hour ere the last of them was gone, so great a stir had the news of the capture of the *Santa Maria* made. Thereafter Sir Jaspar sallied forth after having taken our measurements, for he vowed he would not go a step with us unless we were properly clad, and he brought back a tailor with him and would have had me wear a doublet of scarlet, a purple cloak and cap, and trunk hose of white satin cloth stripped with yellow bands, besides other foppery.

'Good lack!' said I, 'would you make a humming-bird of me? Nay, nay, Master Tailor, I will have none of this.'

It took the worthy man of cloth some little time and trouble to fit me, but at last he got me into a suit of plain grey colour, very prettily trussed and edged with silver cord and having a collar of white lace, for I would not wear a ruff. This, with a flat cap adorned by a great feather, set me up in royal fashion, though I was a very humble bird compared with Sir Jaspar, who showed as many colours as a rainbow, and yet there was nothing in bad taste, for, as he was wont to say, 'If I can do nought beside, I can cover my nakedness in a proper fashion and one pleasing to the eye.'

Simon, however, would have nothing to do with the tailor and his stuff, and perchance it was as well, for by the time Sir Jaspar had finished his dressing we were a trifle late and had to hurry to the palace at our best speed.

Now I am not minded to set down all that befell us at our audience with Queen Bess, for beyond a doubt the Court chroniclers made a record of it at the time, and in far better writing than I could manage, even with Master Fraser's help. Suffice to say that though since that time I have travelled far and wide, seen many courts and mighty monarchs, yet I have never seen so great a sight as the gathering in the palace of Elizabeth. All manner of men were there—soldiers and mariners, men of letters, statesmen and adventurers, courtly gallants and needy beggars, a vast mixture of craft and folly, learning and flattery, ambition, selfishness and greed—all

brought together under the sway of one proud woman who ruled them with an iron will and did with them as she pleased. I saw many great men and beautiful women, though these latter were no favourites of the Virgin Queen, but two faces I looked for I did not see—to wit, Maid Marjorie's and the good Sir Francis'. The admiral was not at the Court, and I was sorry for it, as I knew full well how he would have loved to hear my tale; but he heard it from me many a time thereafter, so that he missed little.

The Queen received us most graciously, and was not a little astonished to find Sir Jaspar one of 'the doughty three,' as some wit called us, and the little knight was beside himself with delight, and, being no whit abashed, told the tale in much the same fashion as he had told it to Will Netherby, and so pleased was Her Majesty at it, and at her discernment in thinking me of noble birth—for she said that despite my stature she knew this at first glance—that she gave orders that we should be lodged and fed at her expense, though she took good care to claim a goodly share of the *Santa Maria* as her perquisite.

We straightway found ourselves in everyone's good graces, and, as Will Netherby had said, nothing was heard of Sir Jaspar's trouble or the Papish plot; yet, for all the gaiety and pleasuring, we could see that many were ill at ease, and it was reported that Elizabeth herself took strange fits of gloominess, and showed such temper and waywardness now and again that none dare approach her. Indeed, at that time she had many enemies, and, I verily believe, looked upon the coming of the *Santa Maria* as a godsend, for it put everyone in good humour, and it had been a happy hit to knight me on the spot, for of late, I was told, she had shown overmuch favour to flatterers and worthless fellows.

Simon alone was not best pleased at all the fuss, for the rugged old pikeman was in no way fitted for a courtier, and in those days was scarce civil, being pestered by folk who would have dragged from him the whole history of his life, and have found out, if they could, what he ate and drank, and whether or no he had a mole on his left shoulder.

'Beshrew me, Jeremy,' he said, 'one can get no peace; preserve me from such nonsense.'

We were mightily tired by the time we got back to our

modest dwelling, but, for all that, I was for hurrying off alone for the street of Saint Mary Axe, which I had found was in a part of the town near the King's Gates, and close by the river. Simon and Sir Jaspar would not hear of it, however.

'As you love me,' said Sir Jaspar, 'let me have something to eat first, and then I shall go with you, and so will Simon. You would find it no easy matter to make your way through London streets, and there is plenty of time.'

Seeing the truth of what he said, I waited, with what patience I could, till Sir Jaspar had changed his clothes and stowed away a goodly meal, and then, having armed ourselves, we sallied forth, and I can remember that my heart beat faster than ever it had done since I stood at the well; but such is a man's folly, and there is no accounting for it. For all that, I remember marvelling at the number of folk who thronged the streets, and who buzzed in and out of the booths and warehouses, like busy bees, some carrying bales of cloth and good stuffs, others with leathern aprons, such as armourer's wear, and yet others who seemed to have naught to do but take the air and show off their gay clothes. It would take a long time, howbeit, to tell of all I saw, and yet, though there was much to interest and surprise, the town itself was a dull and ugly place compared with the Scottish capital, and save for the ever-changing river, the great tower, the palaces and houses of law, had little of interest for me who had seen the rugged castle rock, the dark Nor' Loch, the lion hill, and the steep streets and lanes of high Dunedin, as some call Edinburgh.

After some brisk walking we came to the street for which we were bound, and found it very quiet and grass grown, just such a place, as Sir Jaspar pleasantly put it, as you might wish for were you bent on stabbing a man in the back and leaving none the wiser. The houses were surrounded by high walls and gardens, which stretched downwards to the river bank, and the place was deserted, save for a lean dog which was sitting on its bony haunches, and for no apparent reason pouring forth a flood of melody, to wit, a most unearthly whining and barking, which, however, Sir Jaspar put an end to by means of a convenient stone, that happily caught the singer on the ribs. It wanted yet a few minutes of the time, if, indeed, it was six of that day the message meant,

for it had left that matter to my own discretion. This being so, Simon and Sir Jaspar concealed themselves at one end of the street while I walked slowly down it, wondering what the verse meant, and if anything would come of it. I had not gone very far, however, when a gate a little in front of me and on the opposite side of the street was opened, and an old woman looked out. She wore her silver white hair under a mutch, and had a pair of ruddy cheeks like Fifeshire pippins, while there was a motherly look about her, so that when she beckoned to me, though I had never set eyes on her before, I crossed the street without hesitating a moment. She looked me up and down as if to take stock of my character from my outer man, while I gazed with much respect at her buxom form and cheery face.

‘Here I am, good dame,’ said I, in answer to the message.

‘And here you stay,’ she said, in a queer piping voice, ‘till you give me proof that what you say is true.’

By good fortune I had the note with me, and showed it her forthwith.

‘Your name?’ she asked.

‘Sir Jeremy Clephane,’ I answered, with perchance a touch of pride.

‘Be you a wedded man?’

‘God forbid,’ I answered, with much fervour.

At that she gave a little squeak of laughter, and then, beckoning me to follow, led the way into a garden and closed the gate.

We skirted the side of a small house, and presently I found myself in a larger garden, which led from what was the true front of the house down in a gentle slope to the broad river, and which was pleasantly adorned with bushes, shrubs and a few late flowers, while a great fountain splashed and bubbled on a portion of lawn where the grass was cut and trimmed.

There were fruit trees growing by the walls, and here and there the ivy twined around and clung to the crumbling stones, and from the quiet of the place one might have been in the heart of the country instead of in the outskirts of London town.

I turned to ask my guide why she had brought me hither but to my surprise she was gone and I was alone.

Fearing I had been trapped, I drew my rapier—the same good blade which had served me so well in times past by land and sea, and which now stands where my old eyes can light upon it as I lift them from the desk—I drew my sword, I say, and took note of the house.

It was a building of wood, two storeys in height, and a great pear tree clambered up it from beside the porch and crept past the deep-set windows. I noted that a faint cloud of smoke curled upwards from one of the chimneys, but beyond this there was no sign of life; all was still, but for the rhythmic splashing of the fountain, and the song of a red-breast perched on a tree branch near me.

'*Mon Dieu !*' said I to myself, 'what does it all mean?' and keeping my sword in readiness I set off down one of the broader paths, across which the evening shadows were beginning to fall, and which was littered with the fallen leaves.

On I went, and then suddenly I saw a sight which interested me and made me stop. I had come upon two great toads, fat, bloated fellows with rugged backs and brilliant eyes, who were in a fine quandary. They had hold of a huge earthworm, each having a slippery end in his big mouth, and each was striving to drag the poor worm from the other.

Now one would gobble in the slack, anon the other, both working with their short, ugly forelegs and little jointed fingers, and each striving to cram the unhappy worm's red and wriggling form down his capacious throat. Then they would stop and pull away from each other till the worm grew thin in the middle, and then as one looked to see it burst asunder, they eased the strain and began again, for it was clearly a game of all or nothing. They did not heed me in the least, and I watched the strange contest with a keen interest. All at once it ended. One of the great fellows opened his mouth widely to get a better hold, and as he gaped, lo ! in a moment the worm had wriggled free. The luckless toad stared stupidly about him as if wondering what had happened, and then glancing sideways with his bright eye, he made a sudden dart forward, but in vain. The other was too quick for him, and like a flash shovelled the hapless worm out of sight and then sat peacefully and gazed at his vanquished brother, and, as I live, I could have sworn he had a grin upon his face.

'Bravo !' said I, 'all or nothing, that is the game for me,' and then finding I had taken a crick in the back with stooping to watch the combatants, I straightened myself, and there before me stood Madame de Sholtz !

She was looking at me with an amused smile, and I noted, for it is strange what one sees at a critical time, that she was wearing the same dress as when I had first seen her, or at least one similar in make and colouring. I gazed at her long and earnestly, and to my mind she was more lovely than she had been, for her figure was more rounded, her shapely head poised more gracefully upon her shoulders, and in short, from being a young maid she had become a woman, and a very beautiful one to boot. She returned my look not a whit abashed, and was the first to speak.

'You are pleased to be amused with little,' she said.

'Madame,' I answered, with much gravity, 'had you seen the horrid cruelties which I have witnessed, ay, and undergone, you would find pleasure in very little, I warrant.'

She looked at me a trifle curiously I thought, and her under lip trembled ever so lightly.

'You received my message ?' she asked.

'I did, madame, and made haste to come hither as you directed.'

'I am much beholden to you, Sir Jeremy,' she said ; 'it seems you have gained a longer name since we parted, and, if my memory serves me aright, one you desired.'

I made no answer, being, to tell the truth, too much taken up with watching her face to pay heed to what she was saying.

'Dost remember how we parted, you and I ?'

'Madame,' said I, 'surely you will spare me this. I did not come here to be befooled again.'

Suddenly her manner changed and she laughed lightly.

'I am afraid, Jeremy,' she said, 'that you are a very stupid man.'

I started when she called me Jeremy, and remembered she had first done so when I was making ready to fight Honeyman, nevertheless, I merely answered,—

'It may be so, madame, but surely you have not brought me here for no other reason than to tell me so.'

'Truly,' she said, 'you are even more stupid than I thought. Have a care, for dost remember the verse?

"But if again you are in error
This shall be your last endeavour."

Now, why dost thou think I brought you here?'

'I cannot say,' I answered lamely, puzzling over her words. 'Perchance to tell me of my father.'

'Nay, though your poor father is dead.'

'Ah, I feared as much,' I answered sadly, and was silent for a time, thinking of my life in Kirkcaldy and the last time I had seen the old man.

When I came to myself I found that I had sheathed my rapier and was walking beside Madame de Sholtz, and I was conscious that she was looking at me with a curious smile upon her rosy lips.

'You seem to have had some strange adventures, such as you once told me you wished for. Wilt tell me something of them?'

'Willingly,' I answered, and told her part of the tale which I have written. She listened with an eager interest, questioning me here and there, and I could see her cheek pale as I told her of the iron Virgin and my dance with the great snake.

When I had finished she said nothing, but her face twitched a little and she turned her head aside.

After a time she gave a little laugh.

'You have indeed seen and done much,' she said, 'and I wonder you ever preferred to leave Kirkcaldy to face all these dangers.'

'Madame,' I answered bitterly, 'I had rather not speak of that. Is your father here?'

'That he is. Indeed, we have had much trouble through loss of means, and my father came to the Court here in hopes of retrieving his fortune, but he is an old man, worn out by grief and trouble of late, and I fear we shall never see Crookness more.'

She looked as if she would weep, a thing I have ever hated to see in women, and a sudden thought struck me. I halted and faced about.

'Look you, madame,' I said, 'it grows dark and I have no

right here, indeed, I have tarried too long as it is, but listen ! I have gained much treasure in my wanderings, and 'tis of little use to me now. This I will place freely at your father's disposal to do with as he lists, and this for—for the sake of the days which are gone. Had matters been different,' I added sadly, 'it might have been settled in another fashion, but as it is, Marjorie—I crave your pardon, Madame de Sholtz—this will be best. I wish no thanks, for your father showed me kindness when no others did, save one, and now farewell, for I dare trust myself here no longer.'

Without looking at her I turned to go, sick at heart, but she touched me gently on the shoulder.

'Listen, Jeremy,' she said, and I could see she was trying to look stern despite the tears in her dark eyes, but the dimple on her chin would not allow of it, nor, for that matter, would her rosy lips, the curve of her fair cheek, and the upward curl of her long lashes ; 'listen,' she said, 'and think what you are doing. You would give this money to the father of Madame de Sholtz.'

'Yes,' I answered wearily, 'as it cannot be otherwise.'

'Ah ! then,' she said, with a little smile, looking straight over my head, apparently at nothing, and speaking slowly, 'I fear it will not benefit my father.'

'And why, pray ?' I asked, wondering what she meant.

'Because,' she said, looking me suddenly in the eyes, 'because, Jeremy, he is not the father of any Madame de Sholtz.'

'Not the father of Madame de Sholtz,' I stammered, 'then—'

'Yes,' she said, with a pretty nod of her head, 'he is the father of Marjorie Bethune, as he has always been, at least since Maid Marjorie, as I have heard her called, was born. Does the name please you ?'

'Heaven help me,' I cried, 'things have come too quickly upon me of late, but this is clear, if you are not Madame de Sholtz you are not the wife of the man from the Netherlands.'

'Well,' she said, 'I am not yet, but—'

'You shall never be,' I cried. 'Where have my wits been ? Confound that fellow upon the steps. I shall wring his neck in due season.'

'You shall do no such thing, Sir Jeremy, for it seems to me

you have been doing little else than wringing necks since I last saw you ; but before we say more I would show you something.'

She put her forefinger into her mouth, and having thus wetted it, she held it aloft for a moment.

'Now,' she said, 'come this way.'

I followed her to the foot of the garden, and there we came upon a still pool, the well of the house, which brought to my mind the little stretch of water in the woods of Kirkcoun.

'Stand here,' she said, motioning me to her side, and together we looked down on the still surface of the pool as we had once done before. She smiled her own sweet smile, which I had come to think the most pleasant sight on earth, and the clear depths reflected it in all its sunniness and brightness.

And then there came a little breath of wind which ruffled the surface ever so gently, and lo! the smile had changed and it mocked me as it had done once before, but when I looked up I saw that the first smile was still there, and, what is more, I knew it was for me and had always been so, and that I had been a blind fool who deserved no such fortune as I saw was already mine, for when a fair maid smiles upon him of her own accord, what more does a man want?

When in a little harbour near the river's bank we had made an end of talking of those matters which were of interest only to our two selves, I learned a few things of which I had before been ignorant. I found that if I had suffered from my unhappy mistake, my maid had endured far more. She had laughed merrily over my error at the time, but when she found that I had gone without word or sign, her laughter changed to tears, though she hoped against hope that I would return ere long. As time passed and there was no news of me, she grew ill with waiting and watching, and, moreover, she had other troubles, her father losing much of his wealth, having unwisely embarked in a trading venture which ended in disaster.

His services to the Huguenots being known, the old man had journeyed to the English court in hope of gaining some post or other, but he was a foreigner, old and forgotten, and things had gone hardly with him. My sweet maid might have set matters right, for she had many suitors, but she

turned a deaf ear to one and all, and would not give up hope of my return.

Judge then of her astonishment when in the ragged wanderer upon the steps she had recognised the man who had fled from her side, the man to whom she had been true these long and weary months. She had taken good care, howbeit, to show no sign of emotion, for the Queen's eyes were sharp and the gay Court was not the place for love scenes, and thus it was that with an effort she had passed me by without look or sign. Happily she had hit upon the plan which had ended in what I looked upon as a very proper way, and so I took good care to tell her and reward her for it after a fashion mightily pleasing to us both. I further learned that there was a Madame de Sholtz at Court, so that I gave up the notion of wringing my informant's neck, who had erred, no doubt, but not willingly, and lastly I found that it had grown dark while we sat talking together, and that I had forgotten all about Simon and Sir Jaspar. This being so, I made haste to depart, but Marjorie would not let me go till I had seen the old laird, and he in his turn, when he had heard the whole tale, vowed I should not go a step till I had drunk a goodly stomachfull of sack with him, and lastly there was so much to be said and done at the gate that the bats were flitting about us ere I was fairly outside it.

'Well, Jeremy,' a soft voice whispered, 'have you found pax?'

'Truly, that I have,' I answered; 'but I fear,' I added with a laugh, 'that I shall find something very different when Sir Jaspar and Simon get hold of me, and so good-night!'

CHAPTER XXXIII

OF THE LAST FIGHT AND THE END OF ALL

HOW I reached home I cannot tell, for my worthy comrades were not to be found at the head of the street. I had, perforce, to discover a way for myself, and walked as though in a dream, wondering if any mortal had ever felt so joyous and light-hearted as I did, and whistling as I had not done since the day I started on my journey from Gosport to Plymouth, after I had escaped the tightening of the rope noose.

I have some vague recollection of coming upon two bands of 'prentice lads hard at work upon each other's skulls, and, for the mere joy of the thing, taking part in the fray; but however that may be, I climbed the stairs as the morning was breaking, and found Sir Jaspar and Simon setting out to look for me.

'Heaven save us!' cried the former, as soon as he caught sight of me at the door, 'here is our lost sheep. But where the devil have you been, Sir Knight, and how is your eye of such a gay colour? As I live, Simon, he has been at the wine bottle. Confess, confess, my canny Scot! have you been nipped at last?'

'What is't, Jeremy?' asked Simon. 'As you vanished at the gate, and there was no sign of you within the hour, we deemed it best to hie us home, knowing that all was right, for had it been a trap, that would have given you sufficient time to make an end of any who sought to finish you, and now solve us the riddle and let us to bed.'

When I had told them all, nothing would please Sir Jaspar but to fetch from the cupboard a flask of fine Canary, which, with great foresight, he had purchased; but before letting us so much as smell it, he got upon

the table and delivered himself of an oration which I would I could remember, for I call to mind that even Simon laughed till he could laugh no more, and I was helpless with mirth. I say we laughed till we found that the little knight had stowed away the better part of the Canary, and then it was his turn to laugh at our rueful faces, for but a mouthful was left for each of us.

I sigh now when I think of these merry times, but even yet I can scarce forbear smiling when I remember that the last sound I heard ere I fell asleep was Sir Jaspar singing, with many a halt and quaver, and perchance a hiccup or two, a stave of his own composing, the burden of which I can still recall,—

‘Sing hey ho, for our travels are done,
We have not a trouble under the sun,
For be the day weary or never so long
It ringeth at length to even song.’

Now, after this a new life began for me, and a very pleasant one to boot. I took good care to perfect myself in all that was needful, and soon could sit a horse with some comfort to myself, and, for that matter, to the beast I bestrode. Moreover, I again fell to practising with the rapier, and found that I had not forgotten the old wrist stroke, while I learned a few tricks which have since proved useful to me, for I had ever been a trifle weak at the lunge. Nothing would please Sir Jaspar but that I should accompany him to some of his beloved taverns, but after seeing a drunken riot, two poor lads slain, and having to hurl the table upon three bloodthirsty villains, I told the little knight that I was done with such follies. Nor was I over-much surprised when he himself sickened of so vile a manner of life, for the months he had spent under God’s sky, breathing the fresh sea air, or marching and camping beneath the green canopy of the tropic woods, had given him a distaste for the drunken revels of the tavern, with its wine fumes and shameless gaming.

Indeed, as Will Netherby told me, Sir Jaspar was twice the man he had been, and he rejoiced much thereat, for he himself was a worthy fellow, though perchance a trifle overfond of a cup of mulled sack.

But when I think of those days my thoughts do not turn to the gay scenes at Court, or to the sights of London town, but rather to the evening-tide, when I was wont to take my way to the street of Saint Mary Axe and meet my sweet maid. Many a memory of the old garden comes back to me as I watch the blue smoke wreaths curl upwards from my pipe bowl, and I can hear Marjorie's joyous laugh, and see again her sunny smile. I can remember how the wind was wont to sport with the little locks of dark hair which nothing would keep in order, and how we would sit and talk together by the hour, till the old laird's gruff and hearty voice summoned us to supper and evening prayer. I found that I had scarce known Marjorie before, and that sorrow had changed her somewhat, for, though merry enough, upon occasion she had her silent times, when she would gaze across the river with far-off, dreamy look, and a sad smile upon her face, and, as I live, I know not which mood I best liked, for if her laugh and pretty ways cheered me, so now and then her silence and tenderness fitted in with my state of mind, for there were some things I could never forget, and some stilled voices I should never cease to hear, and whereas I had left Kirkcounie a mere lad, I had seen and done more than many a man of twice my years, and at times could scarce believe Sir Jaspar was my senior.

A month had passed since the *Santa Maria* had cast anchor in the Thames. The gems had been sold, and we three comrades had naught of which to complain as regards this world's goods. Sir Jaspar and I rested well content, but Simon wearied of doing nothing, for he would not leave me, and I could see the old wanderer longed for a life in the open, away from the bustle of streets and the ceaseless coming and going of the busy town. Seeing him thus, I bethought me that I had never fulfilled my unspoken promises to poor Jack Rogers and Trelawney, and so resolved to ride at once for the west country.

When Simon heard it he slapped his great thigh, and I saw could scarce forbear to cheer, but it was another matter with Maid Marjorie. She would scarce let me go, and showed such fear that I wondered at her folly.

'Look you,' I reasoned, 'twas the last wish of two brave comrades, and go I shall. Moreover, it is but a short journey

for me, and I shall have Simon for company. What ails you, sweetheart?' For a long time she would tell me nothing, but at last I found she had been followed by some fellow on the street, and that she feared evil would come of it.

I could not forbear giving vent to a shout of laughter, partly because I was relieved to hear the matter was so trivial, and partly at her folly.

'Go to Marjorie,' I said, 'your father is with you, to say nothing of old Joan, and though I can well believe you might be followed—'

She pinched my ear, and flushing hotly, said no more, and so, having settled matters, Simon and I one frosty morning, when the mist lay low upon the ground, cantered out of London town, and took the road to Portsmouth. Concerning that ride I have no space to write, but I look back on it with pleasure, though it passed without misadventure, for the sweet country air, the scent from the woods and hedges, the gentle melancholy of the dying year, all served to put us in good spirits, while our gallant steeds, Rollo and Navarre, as they were named, covered the long miles with easy swinging stride, and bore us from east to west to the merry tune of clattering hoofs and jingling bridles. At last we came to Plymouth, and without much difficulty found Rose Tregarthen, and broke the news to her as gently as might be. We might have saved ourselves the trouble for, being a fickle maid, she took the news with an easy mind, and after a hearty fit of weeping, set to work to catch Simon of all men on earth. So clever was she with her tongue, that, what with her wiles and her pretty face, the old pikeman, in comforting her, fell a victim to her charms, and when I rode on to St Ives I rode alone. Here again I might have saved myself the journey, for Mistress Trelawney had gone to join her son in heaven. The poor old dame had been to Plymouth to meet the fleet, and when the *Water Sprite* was not forthcoming, and she heard the news, she sorrowed for her lost boy, and taking to her bed, she never rose from it, and passed away in peace, to find, no doubt, that he had died with honour, and with courage, as befitted a Cornishman and a gentleman of England.

When I got back to Plymouth, I found that Simon had by no means managed to capture the Cornish lass, who, it

seemed to me, was but a heartless jade, and was playing him off against another. When I hinted at this, however, my old comrade would hear nothing of it, and so I wished him good luck ; and as he would not come with me, owing to his maid, and as I would not stay with him owing to mine, it befel that I started alone for London, a little piqued at losing my comrade in such a fashion. All went well till I had passed through the west country, and was come to the little town of Guilford, where I put up at a very poor hostel, and started next morning betimes, hoping to reach London by night. I found, however, that I was far from well, my head ached, and there was a soreness in my bones, while I felt hot and cold by turns.

To add to my discomfort, the sky grew overcast, and soon a violent storm broke forth, but I would take no shelter, and pressed on, for I felt gloomy and depressed, and called to mind Marjorie's fears, while I had a vague feeling of impending evil. All that day I felt weak and ill, and the heavy downpour of rain which fell upon me did not serve to raise my spirits. I rode in a thick mist ; partly what was in the air, partly what rose from my horse's smoking hide, and long ere the short day began to close in, and the sky grow darker, I was soaked through, and a shiver every now and then ran through my chilled body, setting my teeth a-chattering, and making my skin feel as though someone were rubbing at it with a cold file, while I rose and fell in the saddle without spring or comfort, and the water streamed from me in a steady trickle. I knew full well that the tropic fever was upon me once more, for I had oft heard that it will return to the man who has once had it if ever it gets the chance, and therefore I looked anxiously for any house wherein I might take shelter and get something to warm and put a glow through me. But for a long time I looked in vain. The country was very desolate and barren, there being naught but stretches of heath and little patches of copse wood, with here and there dismal slime-covered swamps and little rush-lined pools of stagnant water, and on them all the pitiless rain poured down, and the road, good though it was, yet gave promise of being little better than a quagmire ere night, and the heavy mud began to tell on my good steed as he pushed forward with sunken head and a heavy

lifting of his legs, while out into the night he blew two puffs of vapour from his nostrils, and the foam flecks gathered on his chest.

'Good lack,' thought I to myself as the night drew on apace, 'this cannot last much longer, Jeremy,' and I leant forward in the saddle and peered through the gathering darkness, but there was nothing to be seen, and no sound reached me save the thud of Rollo's hoofs deadened by the slush into which they plunged, the patter of the rain-drops, and the wild, quavering cry of some startled moor-fowl sounding shrill and eerie across the waste.

Every moment I grew worse, till I was fain to sit a huddled heap of dampness, and think with some regret of the warm nights in Trinidad and the spicy smell of the evening air in that far-off isle, and my thoughts went back to the merry evenings with Simon and Sir Jaspar under the shade of palms, and groo-groos, and greasy Indian stems, and had it not been for Marjorie I could have wished myself back once more, despite snakes and dons and stinging flies, for it was growing colder and the air seemed to have a sting of frost in it for all that it rained so heavily.

On we plodded past a lonely belt of Scotch firs, which at any other time would have gladdened my heart by their rugged look, telling of the north and the land o' cakes, but now they merely added to my loneliness and the dreariness of that fearful ride as they stood gaunt and indistinct, black and forbidding, and I could hear the rain swish from their heavy branches as the wind caught them and drove them hither and thither, creaking in a melancholy fashion as if crying aloud against the hardness of their lot. We had scarce passed them, however, when away in front of me I caught sight of a faint light glimmering through the gloom, a mere flicker, but a source of much joy to me, and with hand and voice I cheered Rollo on his way, while the good beast, knowing full well that help was at hand, stretched himself to the work with swinging stride, and sent the mud sputtering from his heels as he quickened his pace and sprang forwards with fresh courage.

The light grew clearer as we neared it, and at last I found that it streamed across the roadway from the window of a little house which stood a trifle back from the road.

It was a lonely-looking place and no other dwelling was in sight, and so I thought it behoved me to take things cannily, and ere I reached it I tumbled off Rollo's back, and leading him by the head, approached the place which, as I got closer to it, showed as a half-ruinous cottage, ill-thatched and weather-beaten, with a most forbidding aspect. A small shed, which was empty save for a stack of hay, adjoined it, and there I tied Rollo to a post and let him munch his fill, and then leaving my cloak across his back, in case I should have need of using my sword arm, I crept softly to the window, and found it, to my surprise, a little open at the foot, and thus I heard a murmur of voices from the room within.

Making no noise, I raised my head and then I could scarce refrain from crying out, for there were two men seated at the little table in the centre of the room, one at each end of it, and it needed but a glance to tell me who they were. The bigger of the twain was Honeyman, though no longer the young ruffler I had known, yet, despite his pointed beard and flabby cheeks, I knew him for the same man who had found from me that there was such a thing as the wrist stroke of De Cusac, the same man whom I had foiled on more than one occasion. And the other I knew also, for he was the villain whose arm bones I had snapped like a pipe stem under the balcony in the High Street of Edinburgh, the pale, mean rascal who, at the bidding of Dick Honeyman, had sought to stab in the back, and who, in the little room under the eaves of the Luckenbooths, had clung to my cloak in terror and prayed me to spare his worthless life.

Strange to say, I felt no wonder at seeing them in this queer place, nor yet thought for a moment that their presence might mean me harm. I only wondered that two such vile rogues as I knew these to be should have escaped the hangman or the hand of God, for, as you will have seen, most of the villains I had known had met a speedy fate, and for the most part a hard one, as witness Bartelow and Saltcombe. The room was a small one, with a ladder at one end reaching upwards to a trap door in the roof, and a door was set in the wall opposite me. There was but little in the place, saving the table, a rude shelf with

pots and dishes, a great chest set in one corner, while in another was a couch of tree branches covered by a deerskin. All this I took in at a single glance, and then fell to watching the two worthies at the table and listening to their talk. They were playing with the dice, and first one would take the little box and rattle it, and tumble out the blocks, and then the other would do the same, and they seemed mightily put about over it, and swore heartily, and looked not best pleased with each other, so that with the excitement of watching them I well-nigh forgot my soaking clothes and deadly shiverings.

'Curse you,' I heard Crauford say, 'I have done your will long enough; 'tis time I had some pleasure to myself.'

'You whining dog,' answered Honeyman, fiercely, 'were you not well paid for it? and yet you did your best to bungle whate'er you had to do.'

'Bungle!' screamed Crauford, in a fury, 'bungle! Had it not been for me, where would you have been? A-picking for the corbies, I warrant, instead of having the little bird a prisoner yonder,' and he nodded towards the door, which, as I have said, was set in the wall opposite. 'I tell you,' he went on, 'I have as good a right to her as you, and by —, if the dice favour me I shall have her yet.'

'You low coward,' began Honeyman.

'Coward!' shouted Crauford, who I could see had been drinking. 'A coward, am I? And what may you be? I wonder what you would say if that squat devil you once set me to kill was to find how you had trapped this Mistress Marjorie?'

'*Mon Dieu*,' I muttered as I heard this, and called to mind Marjorie's fears, which I had ridiculed. Fool that I had been! but for a happy chance she might have become the victim of one of these villains, but, as it was, my fingers strayed to my sword hilt, and then when I remembered how weak and ill I was, I groaned inwardly, for it was a case of two to one, and that one a sick man clad in soaking clothes and taken with an ague. For all that, I was resolved that if either Honeyman or Crauford touched Mistress Marjorie it would be over my dead body, and having made up my mind as to that, I felt comforted a little, and bided my time. The two men were silent again, playing steadily, only I noted

that Crauford drank deeply from a bottle which stood upon the table, and grew flushed and heated, while Honeyman rattled and cast the blocks with a sneer upon his face, yet keeping his eye fixed upon the other, watching his every move as a cat watches a bird, or perchance it was as the bird watches the cat when it sees a likely worm and its enemy at one and the same time.

It was throw and throw about, I saw, and I opined that the villains had fixed upon some number, and that he who reached it first would gain the prize, and I could see that the race was a close one, and, moreover, that it was drawing to an end.

Rattle and click ! Rattle and click ! on went the game, but still I crouched in silence, for the strangeness of the thing held me spellbound with my face against the window-sill and a cold air blowing upon my neck. Thrice they each made a cast, and then Crauford's turn came. I could see his hand tremble. He made his throw, and his face was troubled as he counted the score. Honeyman laughed softly to himself, and was a long time with the rattling, and then very gently he turned out the dice, and after looking, at them he pushed back his chair and rose.

'It has been a very fair game,' he said, 'and now I go to claim the prize. You had best sit still, Master Crauford.'

At this, however, the other sprang to his feet, overturning the stool on which he had been sitting, and pouring out a string of oaths. 'By —— !' he shouted, 'you shall not have her. You fiend, I have borne the toil and the danger and you would reap the reward. I tell you, you shall not have her.'

'Ah ! is it really so?' said Honeyman. 'Who shall prevent me though, that is the question.'

'Here is the man,' I answered in a deep voice, and bundled through the window, which I had opened wide, for I had felt that to stay longer in the cold would take from me what little strength I had, and, moreover, I had thought I heard the sound of a sob from beyond the door.

As I got upon my feet I could scarce keep from smiling, so great was the horror of these two worthies.

Dick Honeyman stood stock still gazing at me with half-opened mouth and a face on which surprise, fear and blank amazement struggled for the mastery.

As for Crauford, he uttered a low cry and clutched at the table, then seizing the bottle he drained it at one gulp and let the glass fall shivering on the floor.

'Now was my time,' I thought, and straightway drew my rapier, the same good sword wherewith I had vanquished the one and driven the other before me. Without a word I advanced upon them and they drew back, keeping step with me as though it were a dance. Honeyman half drew his weapon and glared at me as if I had been a ghost, and truly I think he doubted whether I was mortal or spirit. Once round the room we circled in this fashion, and I did not close upon them, for I was minded to suddenly throw open the inner door and guard Marjorie to the outer one, and then to make a stand so that she might win clear on Rollo's back while I kept the villains in play.

It seemed a hopeful way of getting out of this scrape, but it was not to be, for as I came round near the door there was the sound of a footstep on the ladder and a great leg came through the trap-door, and following it another, and then the body of a huge man, who began to climb down slowly and heavily. He reached the foot, and I saw he carried a great club in one hand and was an evil-looking fellow of great size with a shock of black hair and a face horribly marked with the pox.

'What in Satan's name is this?' said he. 'Am I to have my inn turned into a cock-pit by a set of brawlers? Who are you?' he growled, as he caught sight of me.

I answered him not a word, but seeing matters would quickly grow worse, I got my back fairly set against the inner door and placed myself on guard.

'Curse you!' he said, 'put up that needle, and you two fools,' he added, turning to Honeyman and Crauford, 'can you not manage an affair without making a mess o't? Dost hear me?' he shouted, as I paid no heed to him.

'For God's sake,' shouted Crauford, 'do not go near him, he is a ghoul, and uncanny.'

For answer the great man raised his club and was about to rush at me when Honeyman seized his arm and whispered in his ear,—

'An it must be so, so be it,' growled the ruffian, who seemed to be also the landlord, 'but see you do not fool this also.'

'Trust me for that,' said Honeyman, and then, sword in hand, he came and stood opposite me.

'So,' he sneered, 'it seems we are fated to meet again, Master Clephane, but this I tell you, that we are not fated to part as before.' I answered him not a word, but the moment he was ready I attacked him fiercely and wounded him on the hand, for I knew that if I did not finish the matter quickly it would be the finishing of me. A moment later I wounded him again, but as I did so the other two, fearing, no doubt, that I would kill him, joined in the fray. The man with the club ran in upon his right, and Crauford on his left, and I prepared to sell my life dearly, for I had no hope of vanquishing the three of them. Shortening my sword as the great man swung his club aloft, I sprang quickly in upon him and ran him through with all my force. But as I did so, Honeyman lunged at me and I felt a sharp pain as of a hot skewer run through my right side, and knew that I was badly wounded. But I verily believe I was mad for the moment. I jerked my sword from the landlord's body, which fell backwards with a heavy thud, and uttering a great shout I turned upon Honeyman.

At my cry, and terrified, no doubt, at the look upon my face, Crauford turned and fled, leaping through the window, while Honeyman, who had thought me a dead man, staggered back with despair in his eyes, and a choking gurgle in his throat. I leaped at him in a fury, and drove my sword into him, up to the hilt, and he fell a huddled heap upon the floor, and then as I stood and gazed at the two men whom I had slain, I heard the door behind me open, and turned and saw Marjorie standing on the threshold. I said not a word, for I could not speak, there being a trickling and a bubbling within my chest, and I felt something rising to my throat.

'So, sir,' I heard her say, 'you are a very courteous knight and a true lover, and all this trouble has arisen because, forsooth, you—'

I heard no more, for that which had been rising to my throat came into my mouth, and I knew that I was bleeding inwardly. A mist came before my eyes, I felt faint and giddy, and presently the blood began to gush from between my teeth in a crimson stream. I stood swaying to and fro

like a drunken man, and then I saw a look of fear, a look of wild terror come into Marjorie's eyes, and next moment I fell forward with a crash upon my face, prone at her feet, upon the blood-stained floor.

There is little more to tell, and yet had I time I would fain linger over all that was told me when I came back to life and my wound had healed. I was snatched, as it were, from the very jaws of death, and it was spring tide ere I was upon my feet, and by the time I had returned to Kirkcoun the hawthorns were in blossom once more, and the tiny buds were bursting forth into little green and curling leaves. It was Simon who told me the tale, Simon who was again my trusty follower, for his heart misgave him after I had left him in Plymouth, and finding the maid false, he was not long in coming after me. And it was well he did so, for when he reached the inn he found Marjorie Bethune standing on guard at the doorway, with a drawn sword in her hand. She was bravely facing three cut-purses who had come upon the scene, while a fourth lay wounded on the floor. At the sound of their approach, my maid had dragged me into the inner room and defied them, though the cowardly fellows threatened to murder her, being angered at the sight of the landlord's dead body. Simon, however, made short work of them, and the one who escaped him fled in terror from the great pikeman, who, on seeing me lying dead, as he thought, was filled with a terrible rage and showed the knaves no mercy.

Thereafter, I lay for a month in a cottage hard by, fighting for my life, yet dreamily conscious of a sweet presence which hovered ever near me and supplied my slightest want. It was, perchance, as well we were out of London, for the Queen, after the death of Mary, turned with rage on the ministers who had forced her hand, and the Court was in a turmoil.

And as I have said, I came slowly back to life and learned how Crauford, by a mock message from me, had entrapped and carried off my little maid at the bidding of Dick Honeyman, but when I would have craved her pardon for having scoffed at her fear, she would have none of it, but laughed gaily, though there were tears in her eyes.

‘Nay, nay, Jeremy,’ she said, ‘for if you were harsh with me and erred, how much more did I when I upbraided you, as you stood before me wounded well-nigh to the death; we have learned a lesson, and let us profit by it, and thank the good God who hath ordered all things rightly.’

‘Amen,’ said I very solemnly, and doffed my cap.

So together we returned to Fife, and the old laird and Simon went with us, and so did Sir Jaspar, for the little knight had again to fly the Court. He had got Bazan set free, and that worthy had requited him by making off one dark night with papers of my Lord of Leicester and a goodly sum of gold pieces, and we saw no more of him till the year of the Armada, and then we fell in with him once more, and in a strange way, but that is another tale.

I call to mind also it was in that very year that I discovered the hiding-place of De Papillon. A great galleon came ashore on the very reef upon which the *Hibou* was lost, and from which De Cusac and I had been wont to fish. Simon and I visited the place to see if aught of value had come ashore, for by this time I was a King’s Justice and a man of note. We chanced to light a fire, having got wet upon the reef, and, as luck would have it, the flames spread to the thicket at the base of the cliff, and lo! when it was consumed there was a burrow running underground, the mouth of which had been hidden by a great tuft of dry grass, and the mystery was one no longer.

I would have you know also that I set a stone over the resting-place of my father in the old kirkyard, and a carved cross of wood over the lonely spot where lay all that was mortal of the strange man who had dwelt by the shore in the cold winter months.

Also there is much I would fain write as to my further doings with Simon, and the brave part she who had been my little maid played in a great trial which befell me, but I must cease, for I hear these young rogues, Simon and Jaspar, calling for the old man, and I must totter forth and tell them the oft-told tale they love to hear, and especially they delight in hearing of our Lady the Virgin, and the battle with the great snake; and they ask me questions till my old head whirls, and I drive them away in mock anger. Yet ere I lay aside my pen and let the ink dry in the horn,

I would set it on record that there are many things for the which I would thank God, but more especially for three things—for the love of Maid Marjorie, for the friendship of Simon Grisel, and last but not least, for without it this tale had never been told, for the knowledge of the wrist stroke of De Cusac.

THE END

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